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MARXISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

The History of a Relationship

MAURICE BLOCH

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MAURICE BLOCH

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Preface

Marxism has recently become for anthropologists a new source of obscurity as a result of recent work which is difficult and barbarously phrased. On the other hand anthropological topics, which have always had a major place in Marxism, are often just as difficult as Marxist writings to understand and evaluate for those with a more general interest. Neither of these problems seems unsurmountable, and it is the purpose of this book to explain the history of the developing relationship between Marxism and anthropology, in a way which the non-specialist should find accessible, as well as to contribute something to ongoing debates. Any technical term used here, whether from Marxism or anthropology, is explained in the body of the text, and the index will enable the reader to refer back to these explanations.

Because this book is part of a series, I have concentrated mainly on those topics which principally concern pre-capitalist and pre-feudal societies. It does not seem to me that a reader principally interested in capitalism, or imperialism, or the theories of such Marxist writers as Althusser or Gramsci would turn to a book such as this, and so I have kept discussion of these topics to a minimum.

M.B.

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1. Anthropology and the Work of Marx and Engels

The area of study in the social sciences which has gone under the name of anthropology in English-speaking countries has traditionally concentrated on primitive peoples. Anthropology as an organized subject goes back to the mid-nineteenth century (Fortes 1969:6, following Kroeber) and was closely associated with the study of evolution. Cultural and social anthropology was then concerned with the evolution of human society and culture. Inevitably the early history of anthropology became closely allied to the history of Darwinian evolutionary theory and many controversies which now seem obscure relate to the burning debates surrounding the concept of natural selection. None the less, anthropology soon became an independent academic study, first by amateurs, and later by university researchers. In time, academic anthropology became less directly associated with evolutionary ideas, and it tried to establish itself as a respectable, if not conservative, branch of the social sciences. How then did this apolitical, academic subject come to play such an important part in the development of Marxism?

Marx was, as Engels stressed in his funeral oration, first and foremost a revolutionary, and so the importance which he attached to the study of pre-literate peoples, the traditional field of anthropology, might at first seem strange. In fact, his intense interest, an interest which he passed on to Engels and other revolutionary Marxists, is neither accidental nor peripheral: it is one indication of the difference between Marx's thought and that of other revolutionaries, whether his predecessors or his contemporaries. It is one indication of why he has had such unique influence on the history of mankind.

Marx was not the first to denounce the wretched condition of the working class in capitalist countries, nor was he the first to point out the apparent anomaly that those who produced the wealth, the workers, were the poorest while those who were apparently useless drones, the capitalists and their associates,

were the richest. However, he was the first who did not under estimate the power and the complexity of the system which had produced such a

state of affairs. Because of this, Marx took as one of his main tasks the understanding of how this system came into being, and this was in order to discover why this system had such power over the minds of those who operated it, whether exploiters or exploited. This is what made Marx so different from his socialist contemporaries. At the same time as he was engaged in more political work, Marx attempted to rewrite the history of mankind for the use of the oppressed, so that they would be able to understand the nature of the oppression to which they were subjected, and how it had come about. For Marx this historical work was also political, because he believed that understanding the workers' condition through the study of history would enable them the better to fight it. Anthropology had a place in this scheme because for Marx it was the study of the early history of mankind.

This rewriting of history was not so much a matter of starting again, but of making use, for a new purpose, of knowledge which was already available, whether in the work of philosophers like Hegel, economists like Ricardo, biologists like Darwin, or anthropologists. This new use meant a severe criticism of the earlier knowledge, since Marx believed that the studies he was using had originally been made for exactly the opposite purpose to his; they had been made in order to justify the oppression which Marx saw as the core of the capitalist system. This was particularly true, Marx felt, of economists, but he was to show that it was also true of some anthropologists.

Naturally Marx started by explaining the historical mechanism and inner working of the social system which dominated the condition of the working class at the time when he wrote on capitalism. This is where he devoted most of his energies. However, in order to expose the nature of capitalism, Marx first had to show that capitalism is not based on some eternal immutable truth, as presented by economists, but is the product of a long history. For example, the law of supply and demand, as it operated in nineteenth-century England, he argues, was not simply a matter of eternal logic, nor were such rights as that of private property self-evident truths, but rather they were the product of particular historical circumstances. Those circumstances had brought about the capitalist system and had also created the concepts on

which it was based. In showing capitalism and capitalist values to be the

creation of a moment of history Marx negated the transcendental claim of capitalism to be *the* only possible natural system for civilized man, and in this way challenged the basic precepts of capitalism. Marx's challenge to capitalism therefore took the general form of demonstrating the general forces which govern the history of man, and demonstrating how historical processes produce systems of institutions and ideas of such complexity that their origin can only be discovered with great theoretical effort and by examination of the historical evidence. That is what led Marx to history and then to anthropology as, in the course of his work, he pushed his analyses ever further backwards in the evolution of human society. In part Marx saw this task as paralleling what had been done by Darwin for biological evolution. In this Marx was similar to many of his contemporaries, such as Spencer or Comte, but he was also very different from them, for he did not believe that the same laws apply to biological evolution as apply to human societies. Above all he differed from them because his purpose was always primarily political.

Because Marx and Engels saw the reanalysis of history and anthropology as an essential part of their political activity, they gave an ever-growing importance to the study and understanding of pre-capitalist societies. As this work proceeded they began to include discussions of ever-earlier periods, and therefore they moved more and more into the field of anthropology. At first in The German *Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto,* both relatively early works, their interest mainly concentrated on feudalism, the period in European history which comes immediately before capitalism. At this stage they hardly mention tribal society. By 1858, however, ten years after *The Manifesto,* their historical horizon had already been pushed further back. Marx was then preparing the elaborate drafts for *Capital,* which have been published in English under the title Grundrisse (1973), or *Foundations,* an important part of which forms a separate book in English under the title *Pre-Capitalist* Economic *Formations.* This contains a much lengthier and more important consideration of tribal social organization, as well as of classical and oriental societies. From then on, the references to pre-capitalist systems

become more and more numerous in the work of Marx and Engels, but it was really from 1880 on, when Marx was shown the work of the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan that he and Engels gave a major place to the study of tribal societies.

Marx's last three years, and much of Engels's work from then on, almost seem to be dominated by anthropological concerns. We know in part of this intensive study of the work of anthropologists from Marx's notes, published by L. Krader under the title The *Ethnological Notebooks of Karl* Marx (1972). This work, however, only really came to fruition in Engels's famous book *The* Origin *of the* Family, *Private Property and the State,* a book which although written after Marx's death was extensively based on his notes. This book, discussed in detail in the next chapter, follows in part the work of Lewis Henry Morgan. It incorporates information about pre-literate society into the wider theoretical edifice which Engels and Marx had been building all their lives. It is the first Marxist book in which anthropological data predominate.

Anthropology thus played a central role in the development of Marxism but it would be totally misleading to think of Marx and Engels as early anthropologists. This is because the anthropology which they used and reinterpreted was part of a much wider work which went beyond and across any disciplinary boundaries. There is no barrier between Marx's and Engels's anthropology and their history, nor is there a barrier between their history and anthropology taken together and their politics. In order to understand the significance of the anthropological work they used, therefore, we must ask, what was the role of this work in the wider context of their writings and politics? Why were they interested in those topics which they chose to emphasize, and why did the work of certain authors, especially that of Lewis Henry Morgan, gain such prominence in their thingking?

In order to answer this last question it is necessary to look briefly at the type of anthropological work available to Marx and Engels at the time they were writing.

Marx's and Engels's search for theories of the evolution of society was not difficult in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Anthropology had

in fact developed as the science of the evolution of human society and many early anthropological works take the form of natural histories of mankind. These histories, it was believed, could be constructed by looking at the available information on primitive peoples, past and present, whether from achaeological remains, from classical accounts of early institutions, such as those given by Tacitus concerning the German tribes of Roman times, or early Greece and Rome themselves, or, most importantly, from the reports of travellers, explorers,

colonists, and missionaries, describing contemporary primitives. These reports amassed in Europe in ever-increasing numbers from the sixteenth century on. One of the first such histories was written by the French writer and philosopher Montesquieu in the middle of the eighteenth century under the title The *Spirit of* the Laws. This was an attempt to explain the evolution of law in terms of the nature of government, which itself was explained by a variety of other factors, such as climate and population density. Montesquieu's own work was not entirely new since it was based on classical models, but it started a growing tradition both in France and in the other main centre of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Scotland. From the first, these universal histories represented both scientific advances and political and religious challenges. That was because they tended to imply that beliefs, laws, and principles were not based on eternal unchanging principals but were aspects of the type of society in which they occurred. Furthermore because these societies change and evolve it was natural that morals and laws should also change according to the social and economic system. This tradition of writing natural histories of human societies continued to develop with individual and idiosyncratic additions throughout the nineteenth century in a number of different countries.

From 1860 on, however, a dramatic increase in the number of such works occurred; a veritable explosion of major publications took place which owed a great deal to the excitement aroused by The Origin of Species. It is in the light of these publications and the furore caused by Darwinian evolutionary theories in general that Marx's and Engels's historical work on pre-capitalist societies must be seem Indeed, Marx saw his work very much in this light and at one time proposed to dedicate *Capital* to Darwin, who refused, horrified as he already was by

the religious and political repercussions of what he had written. For Marx, however, these political and religious implications were what was central. Evolutionary theory gave a natural origin to human institutions instead of the supernatural origin which was the received and legally sanctioned view in much of nineteenth-century Europe, and if institutions and ideas had a natural historical origin they could be changed in changing conditions.

The theory of natural selection meant that natural species could be explained in terms of the conditions necessary for their survival, and it seemed a small further step to explaining human

social systems in such terms; that is, in terms of the ways by which human beings gained their livelihood and reproduced. This was very much the implication which was drawn from Darwin's work by those anthropologists who published immediately after The Origin *of* Species, so that they enthusiastically talked of natural selection and the survival of the fittest in their outlines of human history. Marx's attitude is more complex.

On the one hand Marx saw Darwinism as a materialist explanation of man, and he sought theories of the evolution of human societies which similarly explained the process in terms of the changing nature of human production and reproduction. This evolution of human society could explain what mechanisms had produced the ideas, principles, and processes which governed capitalism, why these had come about, why they had strength, and, ultimately, where their weakness was.

On the other hand, if Marx, like most of the anthropologists of his time, saw the study of human society as the continuation of biological evolution, he did not, as they did, believe that human historical processes were the same as the processes of natural selection. Throughout his work Marx stresses how different man is from animals, because he acts in terms of ideas and concepts which are formed in his mind, and therefore human history is of a different kind to natural history. Marx pours scorn on eighteenth-and nineteenth-century philosophers, such as the utilitarians, who believed that ideas and values had no real significance but were a mere reflection of natural conditions. For Marx, as for Hegel and Kant, the German philosophers

who greatly influenced him, ideas could not be brushed aside and the unique character of humans as thinking animals was central to all his work. This meant that Marx had to develop a theory which recognized the intellectual nature of man, but which—and in this he was different from Hegel and Kant, who did not believe that there could ultimately be a material origin to ideas—could account for the peculiar history of mankind and for the growth of ideas and their power in natural terms.

The answer which Marx gave to this problem resembles that given later by Durkheim. Marx concluded that the purely abstract philosophical debates which had characterized such discussions, in Germany, at least, were fruitless. Rather, Marx argued, the nature of man could only be revealed by seeing man in society, in history, and in politics. There was no point in imagining him

outside of his context, because out of this context he was not, in any useful sense, man.

Marx's attitude to the numerous anthropological works which came out between 1860 and 1880 was therefore in part one of shared enthusiasm for evolutionary theory, but also in part one of suspicion. This suspicion had two causes: he felt that many of the anthropologists underrated the significance of thought, and secondly he suspected the political motives of at least some of them.

In 1861 two books were published, both of which influenced Marx and Engels. The first was a study by the British lawyer Sir Henry Maine called *Ancient Law.* This examines the development of classical and early Indian law in terms of the famous generalization that law and, by implication, society evolves from 'status to contract'. In early societies relationships between people are governed by such things as their gender, their age, and their family relationships (these Maine called status relations), while in more advanced societies they are governed by contractual arrangements which are not concerned with the status of those involved, but only with the matter which brings the individuals together. Marx accepted this general point implicitly though he nowhere discussed it in full (Krader, 1972:36) and it was to offer a framework to much of his later writing. He was later to become

suspicious of Maine's motives, however, as he was to see in the glorification of contract a subtle justification of the legal institutions of capitalism, and he was to see in Maine's insistence on the primacy of the monogamous family an attempt to prove that this institution was beyond historical change.

In the same year the Swiss scholar, J. J. Bachofen, published *Das* Mutterrecht, (Mother Right), a book showing that matriliny, the tracing of descent through women, and matriarchy, the dominance of women in society, as well as the cult of female goddesses, preceded the patriarchy and the patriliny we find in Biblical and Classical societies. This idea was accepted with varying degrees of caution by many nineteenth-century anthropologists and ultimately was wholly endorsed by Engels, who, in the preface to the fourth edition of The Origin *of the Family,* Private Property and the State, gave warm praise to Bachofen. Bachofen and Maine were soon followed by J. F. McLennan, a Scotsman whose work in part coincided with that of Bachofen and Maine but which developed much more the study of kinship systems.

This focus on kinship had an influence on both Marx and Engels which culminated in their enthusiasm for Lewis Henry Morgan whose two principal books had a decisive effect on their later work.

Morgan was an American lawyer whose involvement in anthropological theory was gradual, originating in his political and ethnographic interest in American Indians. He realized the importance of kinship systems for the Indians and how for them most social relationships were seen in terms of who was the child of whom and who was married to whom. His fascination with these systematic orderings of society by kinship was such that he undertook a massive comparison and classification of as many systems of kinship terms as he could find from around the world, terms such as 'cousin', 'uncle', etc. This immense task formed the basis of his first major work: Systems *of Consanguinity and Affinity of the* Human *Family* (1870) and was incorporated in his later and much more ambitious book Ancient *Society* (1877), which established a series of stages through which mankind was supposed to have proceeded. These stages were based on productive technology. For example, hunters and gatherers were placed low while irrigated cultivators were placed high, then these

activities were linked directly with such institutions as rules concerning property, the status of women, the type of government, and the kinship system. In this, Ancient Society resembled the other evolutionary schemes for the history of mankind which we have just noted. However, Ancient *Society* also differed from earlier work because of the high quality of the scholarly work on which it was based, because of the sympathy of the writer for primitives, and because it not only defined stages but in many cases suggested mechanisms which explained why one stage should change to another.

This last element, perhaps more than any other, is crucial for understanding why Marx and Engels attached so much more importance to the work of Morgan then they did to the work of the other evolutionist anthropologists whom they read. Morgan seems to suggest, however tentatively, reasons why one stage should change into another, in the idea that the processes of evolution themselves lead to the destruction of the stages they produced. This theory came close to some of the central ideas which Marx had developed for capitalism.

Marx's exposition of capitalism was not just an attempt to

show its nature and its temporary character, it also showed how capitalism has an inner dynamic which brings about its development, its fruition, and ultimately its destruction. All of Marx's and Engels's work attempts to isolate dynamic processes implied in the social forms which they were studying. Marx argues in many places, but most clearly in the *Preface to the* Critique *of Political Economy,* that the source of the destruction of the capitalist system would come from the fact that the social system which itself had been created in order to work the factories and markets of capitalism would become increasingly incompatible with the technological requirements of these factories and markets, and that ultimately this incompatability would lead to revolution. This theory was elaborated at length by Marx for capitalism but he also assumed that similar phenomena would occur in noncapitalist systems.

Morgan was the only one of the nineteenth-century anthropologists who, like Marx, was interested in what led to the transformation of one social system into another, and in what led to the breakup of past systems. The reason Morgan sees for the passage of society from one stage to another—and this is what is most stressed by Engels in his restatement of Morgan's theory in The Origin—is a social break due to the fact that the various subsystems stop working in gear, and come into conflict with each other. At such a point, the system implied by the technology of production - the kinship system, the system of property allocation, the political system, and the State — come into contradiction with each other, and in this way lead to the end of one stage and the appearance of another. For example, when discussing the passage from matriliny to patriliny, Engels (p. 119) echoes Morgan's formulation in the following way: 'Thus, on the one hand, in proportion as wealth increased (as a result of the domestication of animals) it made the man's position in the family more important than the woman's, and on the other hand created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favour of his children, the traditional order of inheritance. This, however, was impossible so long as descent was reckoned according to mother right. Mother right, therefore, had to be overthrown'. Here we have the notion that as the system of technology (the domestication of animals and the formation of herds) develops, it becomes incompatible with the social system, especially the system of inheritance and familial authority. This growing incompatability,

or contradiction, then leads to a revolutionary change in the social system, in this case the change to father right, a system which according to Morgan and Engels was better adapted to pastoralism.

Engels and Marx therefore saw in Morgan's ideas about the passage from one stage to another a confirmation of their general theory of social change. This is perhaps the most important reason why Marx and Engels concentrated so much on Morgan's work, and by and large accepted the main lines of his account of the early history of mankind. Morgan's work offered to Marx and Engels the early history of the processes which led to the creation of capitalism. It also enabled them to show that the same processes had governed history from the earliest time and that a science of history was therefore possible. Anthropology

and the work of Morgan were harnessed to the political task of rewriting history.

There was another political task to which anthropology was put in the work of Marx, and for this the writings of Morgan also proved particularly appropriate. The use of anthropology which we have already noted can be called historical. Marx and Engels were interested in primitive cultures because they wanted to construct a general history and theory of society in order to explain the coming to be of capitalism. The second way in which they use anthropological material we can call 'rhetorical'. They wanted examples and cases to show that the institutions of capitalism are historically specific and therefore changeable: in order to demonstrate this they looked for examples of institutions which were as different from those of capitalism as possible. In order to find examples of such an antithetical state of affairs they naturally turned to primitive society, as they assumed, like many before and after them, that these societies would offer illustrations of systems as totally different to those they knew as could be found anywhere. For example, given the great emphasis on the family and monogamy in Victorian England they were delighted when they found in the work of anthropologists a statement that there had been societies with sexual freedom and no notion of the family. This second and logically distinct, rhetorical use of anthropological material is never completely separate from the historical use, and the mixture of the two became, as we shall see, the source of many problems.

The rhetorical use of anthropology inevitably involved Marx and Engels in a search of the anthropological literature for ex-

amples of opposites to the institutions of capitalism. Since their work focused on certain topics it was natural that they particularly looked for evidence relating to these topics, and as examples of the rhetorical use of anthropology three such central topics can be noted here in a preliminary way. These are the relationships existing between people engaged in the process of production, 'the relations of production', property and the family.

Marx's work in *Capital* is focused on the nature of the social relationship which existed between workers and capitalists: the capitalist relations of production. Marx stressed the apparently impersonal nature of this relation in capitalism. It is as if labour is a thing which comes naturally on the market and then inevitably is bought and sold according to the laws of supply and demand. In this way of looking at the economy, wages seem to be determined by forces as inevitable as mathematics, and if wages were low this was no doubt unfortunate, but there was nothing anybody could do about it, any more than it would be possible to change the laws of gravity. Marx's whole work was an attempt to show that this image was false; that there was nothing inevitable about all this, but rather that this apparent powerlessness of the worker to determine the wage was the product of the distribution of property and especially of the distribution of the ownership of the means necessary to produce: the ownership of such things as land, machines, tools, etc. The capitalist system implied a monopoly of these 'means of production' in the hands of the few, so that the workers had no alternative but to work for the capitalist and on his terms in order to survive. There was nothing inevitable or god given about this unequal distribution, and it is that which produced the impersonal free labour market and the exploitation. The relations of capitalists and workers were therefore the product of a specific state of affairs, the ownership of the means of production by the capitalists— a state of affairs which had arisen in history and was not inevitable, or given in the laws of logic.

One obvious way of demonstrating that this system was a specific historical product was to show that it was not always so, and Marx and Engels turned to history and anthropology to demonstrate this. Marx referred throughout his work to other systems than the capitalist system, especially those which he knew from the history of Europe to have preceded capitalism: systems such as feudalism, where the relation of production was characterized by the personal relation of the feudal lord and his

serf and a relation of subordination which came from the lord's control of the land Similarly Marx was interested in slavery and in the classical Indian and Chinese social systems, or in those systems where the ties of local community are all important. All these examples enabled Marx

to show that the relations between those involved in the process of production can be extremely varied and need not be the depersonalized capitalist ones. Rather Marx and Engels sought to show how social relations are themselves the product of the social system in which they occur, of the way the material conditions of existence are organized and regulated a system which is itself the product of history or of the particular stage of evolution.

It is in this general perspective, aimed at demonstrating the link between the relations of production and the nature of the systems in which they were located, that Marx and Engels turned to the available anthropological information on pre-literate people. They assumed that since these were the most distant from the capitalist system they would manifest the most different social relations of production. They found confirmation of this in the one fact that nearly all nineteenth-century anthropologists were agreed upon, that what characterized primitives (if not perhaps the most primitive) was the predominance of kinship ties as the organizing principle of society. In those societies, argued the anthropologists, people related to each other had obligations to each other, solely because they could trace links through parenthood or marriage. It is this conclusion, which, with many modifications, many anthropologists would still accept, which made kinship so important for Marx and Engels. Kinship, they believed, would contrast with the relations of production found in capitalist systems. It seemed to Marx that nothing could be more different than kinship relations and relations in the labour market. This is because kinship links are strongly morally, and socially charged, while those between worker and employer are impersonal, because kinship implies reciprocal rights and duties while the capitalist has all the rights and the worker all the duties, because kinship links cannot be broken at will while those of the labour market can, and because, as Marx and Engels wrongly believed, kinship links are egalitarian and non-exploitative; that is, they do not involve one group of people living on the back of another.

This view of kinship as an opposite to capitalist relations of production explains the vivid interest with which Marx and

Engels examined the work of such anthropologists as Bachofen, McLellan, and Maine who were all concerned with this topic; but above

all it explains once again why Morgan should have been so important for them, since he above all was the expert on kinship.

Marx's and Engels's first concern with anthropological material was therefore to show the variety that exists in the nature of social relations, and the historical peculiarity of a society where one group of people treat others only in respect of the labour they provide, labour which then can be bought and sold as though it was any other useful article. The search for counter-examples led them to the history of the family and of the primitive local community which they saw as kinship based. There, they argued, 'the social structure is... limited to an extension of the family'.

Having reached this conclusion Marx and Engels then realized that if kinship was the system which organized primitive societies, then, kinship in these societies had to be completely different from what it was in capitalist society. This was because, throughout the work of the founders of Marxism, a central idea is that everything in capitalism is linked to the capitalist relations of production, and that therefore the family under capitalism is a capitalist phenomenon. This was to be demonstrated in the same way as the arbitrariness of capital relations of production by showing that in totally different systems the family was totally different.

In the same way, therefore, as they had turned to primitives for finding the opposite of capitalist relations of production, they turned to them for a form of family which was the opposite of the capitalist family. They thus found particularly congenial the work of those anthropologists such as Bachofen, and again Morgan, who saw primitive kinship as almost a total reversal of the family as they knew it. They therefore accepted views of early kinship which represented it as a system where women were superior toj men, where sex was unrestricted, and where the privacy and! isolation of the group formed by parents and children was replaced by the commonality of a much larger undivided group.

The third example of the rhetorical use of anthropology by Marx and Engels concerns a topic linked to relations of production and the family: the nature of property. Marx's analysis of capitalism shows that the system of exploitation of the workers by capitalists appears inevitable

because of a previous allocation of the means of production in the hands of the capitalists. So, as they had done with the relations of production, Marx and Engels tried

to show that this state of affairs was not inevitable, but the product of a specific historical development. They tried to show that the very notion of private property, far from being an ‘inalienable right’ as it was stated to be in the American constitution, was, in fact, itself a product of certain unique economic, technical, and social conditions, and it was therefore reasonable to expect that this notion, like others, would be superseded when the associated relations of production changed.

Marx’s and Engels’s work on pre-capitalist systems is largely taken up with showing the indissoluble link between the type of property and the type of relations of production. The demonstration of the evolution and the transformations of types of property is as central to their work as the demonstration of the evolution of relations of production. In the first of their works which deals with this topic at any length, The German *Ideology,* written in 1846, they state on page 43: ‘The various stages of development in the division of labour are just so many different forms of ownership, i.e. the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument and product of labour.’ However, equally important for Marx was the demonstration of a correlation between private property and exploitation.

Exploitation for Marx is the process by which a group of people are deprived of the full value of their labour so that what they have lost becomes a surplus for another group who obtain this element. Capitalists exploit the workers by depriving them of this surplus value and they do this because of the nature of property in capitalist societies, where the means of production are controlled by the capitalist. In such a situation the worker is at the mercy of the capitalist and is therefore exploited.

This central role for private property has a long history in European thaought and goes back to the eighteenth-century notion of the social contract. Such writers as the English philosopher Locke had argued that the security of private property was an essential prerequsite for the

evolutionary progress of society and increasing human happiness. He, and others like him, were answered by Rousseau, who argued that the social contract which established private property was really the origin of exploitation and had to be replaced by a new social contract. Marx in many ways was the heir of the tradition which goes back to Rousseau and much of his work is concerned with demonstrating

why private property equals exploitation. However, in order to answer those who had argued that without private property society was impossible, Marx looked for examples of a society without private property, again an opposite society, which would therefore also be without exploitation. For this he turned again to Morgan. Morgan's work was particularly suitable for this demonstration. In fact, Marx and Engels did not have much choice among anthropologists because most of them were heirs to the philosophical tradition which went back to Locke and which glorified private property. This was not the case with Morgan who seemed to have been more influenced by the Rousseauean tradition and who viewed the institution of private property with some misgivings.

In any case Morgan's work contained the statement that primitive society was totally without private property, yet organized. It gave the best possible example that could be found for a rhetorical approach to the question of property. It is easy, therefore, once again, to see why Marx and Engels greeted Morgan's work with such enthusiasm, and in particular why they took his side in a major controversy that arose in anthropology between him and McLennan. Morgan asserted, and McLennan denied, the existence of a first stage of society when social life was undifferentiated, when marriage did not exist, and when above all, private property did not occur. For Marx and Engels the existence of such a stage, or something like it, seemed essential in order to show fully the purely artificial and relative nature of both relations of production and private property in capitalism. In other words, Morgan's theories in this field once again fulfilled perfectly the rhetorical requirement for the demonstration of a totally opposite system to that of nineteenth-century Europe.

Marx and Engels therefore asked two things of anthropology. First they looked to it for some confirmation that the general principles of history

which they saw at work in capitalism had always been operative. Secondly, they looked to anthropology to supply them with examples of contrastive, even opposite, systems of institutions to those of nineteenth-century capitalism. They found material for both these purposes in the work of many anthropologists, but on the whole the writings of Morgan seemed best suited to this twin task.

Both these purposes are quite legitimate. It stands to reason that if one is claiming to have discovered universal historical laws

these should apply to very different societies. It is a sign of Marx's and Engels's intellectual courage that they put these laws to the test by seeing whether they accorded with what was then known about early cultures. It is also perfectly valid to use data about other cultures to show that, because these cultures work on other principles than the principles which govern our society, the principles are historically specific and not universal and unchangeable.

There is however a problem, if one is trying to do both these things at the same time. In the first case one is trying to stress the unity of human history, in the other, one is trying to show the diversity and discontinuity of human history. This conflict led Marx, and especially Engels, to a disastrous attempt to combine both approaches by arguing that there really had been an early stage in human history which was a mirror image of capitalism.

This early stage was not constructed from proper historical evidence of any kind. Because of its incorporation into the 'history' of mankind it led to totally fallacious ideas which even today unwittingly mislead many Marxists. In this type of mistaken fabrication of early history, by the construction of an opposite to the present, Marx and Engels were following many other writers of their time but, as we shall see, because of the nature of their theory, this was particularly harmful in their case. This early stage in the history of mankind appears in The *Origin* as characterized mainly by what it does not have. In this time there were no individual families, there was no private property, there was no marriage, there was no exploitation, there was no inequality of any kind even between men and women, since, before the coming of private property women were, if anything, superior. In pointing out that

the specific forms of marriage, family, property, and gender relations which existed in their time had not always existed, Marx and Engels were completely right, but in arguing positively that these things were totally absent in primitive society, they were, as we shall see, almost totally wrong.

The problem with such a misrepresentation was much more significant than a mere historical mistake. A mistake could, after all, have been fairly simply corrected when knowledge about these societies improved. The difficulty lay in the fact that what characterized their view of primitive society was that it was classless and free of exploitation, while the Marxist theory of society is built around the ideas of class. As a result, Marx and

Engels were not only wrong about this early stage in the history of mankind, but they also left themselves unable to deal with it theoretically.

Marx's theory about what causes the historical process has been very widely discussed and we shall return to it again and again in this book, but even at this stage a simple account of it must be given. Marx believed that the history of human societies was to be explained first of all by the nature of man as an animal who had to obtain a living from his geographical environment, which meant not only staying alive, but also being able to look after one's offspring until they could look after themselves.

Marx, however, realized that the need to make a living could never directly explain what human beings do, nor could it account for the complexity of human history itself. This was because human beings worked things out in their minds in terms of concepts and moral rules, and these concepts and rules were not things the individual made for himself on the spur of the moment. One can only understand how things are in terms of concepts in the first place, so in a sense the concepts came first since natural conditions only gain significance in terms of the way one has learned to see them. Furthermore the way one sees tilings, and the values one holds, are not an individualist matter, but something which is shared with other people in a society. Because of this Marx concluded that it was wrong to see ideas and

values simply as adaptations of the individual to natural conditions, as some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers seemed to believe. Society always came before the individual and determined what he thought he wanted. This did not mean that ideas and values came from some supernatural source, but it did mean that they came from the history of society, not the history of the individual.

Society produces ideas and values in a complex historical way which Marx and other Marxists have attempted to define. By and large Marx saw two different processes going on side by side. The first process is in part an aspect of the interaction of men grouped together in a society and engaged in production. This process leads to concepts, ideas, values, and institutions, which, although they are not the direct result of individual production, are the indirect product of the process of production undertaken as a social task. The second process is an aspect of the fact that history also involves the development of exploitation, or the dom-

ination of one group by another so that the dominant group can appropriate to itself the surplus value obtained from the labour of the other. The relation of classes in capitalist society is for Marx the most obvious example of this process. The development of exploitation also leads to the formation of ideas, concepts, values, and institutions, but these, unlike those produced by the first process, are geared to operating exploitation, and involve giving the appearance of legitimacy to exploitation, as well as hiding its true nature from the exploited. This second process Marx and Engels call ‘ideology’.

Marx sees the process of production of concepts, values, and institutions, as extremely complex. This complexity explains why the system of concepts and of values has no direct relationship with the process of production; the two don’t fit. This lack of fit is the product of the historical process of class formation, and it also has historical implications. Marx envisages moments when the social system will accord with the technological system: but at other times it will enter into contradiction with it, leading to revolutionary changes. This continually recurring disharmony Marx attributes to the nature of class relations, and it is this which produces the forward movement of history.

The key to history and the key to the way Marx saw the relationship between ideas, values, and the economic processes of production is, therefore, the exploitative nature of class relations.

As a result of the central place of class in Marxist theory, as soon as Marxists argue that primitive societies are without class theypre left with very little to say about these societies which is in any way distinctive. As we shall see, most of the writings of Marx concerning primitive societies are of the historical type and argue that these societies are class societies. They therefore do not run into this difficulty. For example, in The Communist *Manifesto* Marx and Engels had written: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' But Engels, in later editions, added a footnote to this sentence stating that this remark does not apply to all human history but only to written history.

This was because by then he had written The Origin where he had argued that primitive society was classless, on the evidence he had obtained from Morgan. This view was the product of the rhetorical use of anthropology masquerading as history, and is in fact wrong.

At the same time that Engels argued that primitive societies were classless, he inevitably argued that the complex and subtle theory of history which he and Marx had developed just did not apply to these societies. He states this quite explicitly in several of his works and in particular in The Origin .... This conclusion, based on the fusion between rhetorical and historical use of anthropology in Marxism, left Marxists with almost no adequate *analytical* tools for dealing with primitive societies. Marx's theory of change was based on the growing contradiction that arose in society between the technological side of production and the social system with which it was associated. This contradiction was due to the increasing tension between classes, caused by the development of the technology. If primitive societies were classless, this whole process could obviously not take place, and so the theory of social change did not apply to them. Similarly, Marx's theory by which he explained in part the historical formation of concepts, ideas, values, and institutions as a result of the legitimation of exploitation, (that is, as ideology), was inapplicable to societies without exploitation. Again, by having imagined

wrongly that primitive societies were classless, Engels denied Marxists the use of the general sociological tools whaich had been developed in Marx's work. As a result many Marxists, including Engels himself, fell back onto simple utilitarian explanations when they were dealing with these societies, one of the types of explanation which Marx had vigorously rejected.

This type of simplistic explanation of primitive societies has dogged Marxist anthropology since Engels's time. In a sense, Marxists stopped being Marxist when they turned to primitive society. As a result many Marxists have had to look outside Marxism to explain primitive societies, so they often imported theories of history from the anthropologists whom they used as sources. In later chapters we shall see Marxist writers borrowing fundamental theoretical notions, not just from Morgan, but also from others, such as the British anthropologist Tylor, and the German anthropologist Ratzel, and taking on these writers' simple-minded theories of history in spite of the fact that they were influenced by philosophical positions totally foreign to Marxism. These theories seem naive when compared with the explanations Marxists reserve for capitalist societies. In fact they are no more adequate for primitive societies than they would have been for any others.

The history of Marxist anthropology since The *Origin* has, as a

result, been the difficult, painful, and incomplete recovery of Marxism for pre-capitalist social formations, and the story of this process is what we shall consider in the second half of this book. This recovery has been made necessary because, as we have seen, the rhetorical and historical use of anthropology got so disastrously mixed up in the work of the founders and produced a false picture of the idyllic classless community which was later termed primitive communism and then got further confused with the type of society the Marxists were trying to construct in the future.

2. Marx and Engels on Anthropology

Having seen the general place of anthropological material in Marx's and Engels's writing, we can now look in a little more detail at particular works and their contents. Since the anthropological material forms an organic whole with the writings of Marx and Engels, and is important for everything they wrote, a somewhat arbitrary selection needs to be made of what to examine in detail. We shall therefore only *look* at some of the writings we could have considered, and concentrate on those works which contain a large proportion of anthropological discussion.

The *German Ideology, 1846*

The first book where Marx and Engels include in their political writings a thorough analysis of the evolution of society and of precapitalist social formations is The *German Ideology.* It was a long book which attempted to define Marx's and Engels's position *vis-a-vis* a whole range of contemporary socialist philosophers. It was not in fact published during Marx's or Engels's lifetime.

Only the first part of this work is much read nowadays and that is what is discussed here. The German *Ideology* is often seen with the Theses on *Feuerbach,* which was written just before it, as forming together the first formulation of Marxism. In many ways these books are the continuation of both Marx's and Engels's earlier work. Most important for our concern here is the way The German *Ideology* is the culmination of Marx's critical discussion of the place and significance of the State. For Hegel, the philosopher who up to that time had most influenced Marx, the idea of the State was a major force in history and the true source of justice. This view was then modified by the 'young Hegelians', a group of radical followers and critics of Hegel who argued that it was only the reformed or purified State which could be the source of a just society. Marx carried the criticism of Hegel's position much further, and he is equally critical of the young Hegelians.
He argues that, far from the State being the prime mover of history, the State itself is simply an aspect of a particular type of society.

What Marx meant by a particular society was an organization of people maldng a living together. In this perspective pohtic'al reform of the State was therefore largely irrelevant since what had to be reformed was the complex order of which the State and law were only epiphenomena. By arguing this, Marx therefore redefined the task of the revolutionary. There was no point in being a mere political reformer intent on changing laws and state institutions to make social conditions better. This would be pointless since the State was not the cause of the unjust social system but simply its effect. What was necessary was instead to become a reformer of the very inner basis of society. This fundamental difference with the position of earlier radicals required theoretical analysis in two areas. First of all 'society', as distinct from the State, had to be isolated and analysed, and secondly an attempt had to be made at understanding the evolution of society, since only then would it be possible to understand under what circumstances the State evolved and what its historical significance was. These were the tasks first attempted in The *German Ideology.*

The first task consisted of formulating a view of society which was based on principles different from the traditional ones, according to which societies could be typified in terms of their administrative organization by using such terms as 'democracy' i or 'monarchy'. If we talked of society in these terms, Marx argued, we could never appreciate that the phenomena to which the terms referred were themselves only the product of a more fundamental social process. In order to bypass this traditional way of seeing society, Marx turned away from administrative and political organization and tried to see society in different, more fundamental terms. He argued that society is at bottom a system of organization for producing the goods on which people depend for their life. For Marx and Engels society was to be analysed in terms of the social organization of production, which in The German *Ideology* they called the division of labour. After this had been analysed, they then, and only then, went on to consider how this basic process was linked with ideas and values, such as justice and law, and with institutions, such as property and the State.

The new theoretical starting point which such a study implied became the basis of all their work, and it is the central characteristic of their anthropology. It also implied, however, a further difference from the

earlier studies of societies concentrating on political institutions and laws. People living in a particular society

must be aware of their laws and institutions since they have to obey them. This meant that what the social scientist was doing in building up a picture of the political society was systematizing people's conscious perceptions into a system.

On the other hand, people do not have to be conscious of the system of production as such. They have to make the system work, of course, but in order to do this, they do not have to be conscious of its nature. Indeed, Marx argued that in most cases, because the social system is based on exploitation, people have to be consciously unaware of the basis of society if they are to continue working it. Because of this, a Marxist theoretical construction of the social system implied that one should start by ignoring people's beliefs and ideas and by looking at who produces what and who gets what is produced. This is completely different from what people might *believe* are the contributions made to production by different groups in society and what people might *believe* are the principles of distribution.

Society viewed as a system for production and distribution, conceived of independently of the actors' representations or justifications of the system, is what was later called the 'social formation'. Only after the social formation had been constructed could the evaluation of the role of institutions and values be undertaken in terms of the place of these consciously-realized phenomena in its working.

The significance of using this starting point, outside of the actors' consciousness, cannot be exaggerated, because it set Marx, Engels, and other Marxists on an analytical course which was fundamentally different from other social analysts of their time, and which to a certain extent still distinguishes Marxist analyses from many others.

This first task of working out a method whereby society can be apprehended as a social system for the organization of production, rather than as a structure of consciously realized institutions, is only sketched out in The German *Ideology,* but it was to

be developed in all of Marx's later work, and it culminated in the analysis of capitalism contained in the three volumes of Capital.

The same preliminary character is also found in the other task which Marx's redefinition of the aim of social analysis required. Not only did Marx and Engels require tools for seeing society in a new way, they also needed to understand under what circumstances this newly defined system produced the institutions which

other social scientists had studied. Neither could the evolution of these institutions in themselves explain anything, since, in the perspective outlined above, these were mere side effects of a more fundamental order. What had to be understood was the process which led to the evolution of society seen in this new light. In order to do this, Marx and Engels turned to historical and anthropological information about past societies. Here also their task was to understand history not in terms of the evolution of institutions, but in terms of the evolution of society as they had redefined it. This meant that, although they could turn to the work of historians and anthropologists, they had to reinterpret that work in their own way. It is this task which began Marx's and Engels's study and analysis of anthropological works.

The evolutionary sequence for the history of mankind which is sketched out in The German *Ideology* is patchy and in some respects inconsistent, but the main features emerge clearly.

The first stage in the history of mankind is one which is itself subdivided into three substages. These correspond (1) to hunting and fishing, (2) to the rearing of animals and (3) to simple agriculture (p. 44). The authors are not particularly interested in this technology of production but in how this progression implies an increasing division of labour which alters the nature of social relations. At first, social organization is limited to the family, it is therefore dominated by kinship, and property is communal. The family, however, already contains within itself the seeds of latent exploitation in the ability of the male head to control the labour of women and children (p. 52). This inequality, argue Marx and Engels, implies a form of private property, because exclusion from the means of production (private property) and compulsion of the labour of others, are one and the same thing. This idea, that private

property and exploitation are just two sides of the same coin, is one of the central propositions of Marxist theory and is clearly expressed here. Private property of the means of production leads to exploitation, because if people have no access to the means of production they are at the mercy of those who do.

The embryonic inequality and private property in the family continues to develop through time as the head of the family becomes more a patriarchal family chieftain (the lineage elder of modem anthropology) controlling the labour of the other members of the lineage. Finally, in a further stage of development, the inequality within the family develops into slavery which is already

'latent in the family'. This stage is reached not just as a result of the increasing complexity of the productive technology, in this case the development of agriculture, but because agriculture implies a growth in population density, an intensification of social intercourse, and an increased division of labour.

The division of labour here is a notion used in part to express the fact that with more complex technology one gets more specialization in society, however for Marx and Engels such differentiation also always implies inequality. In this idea Marx and Engels are different from earlier writers such as Adam Smith, or later writers such as Durkheim, who saw nothing necessarily inegalitarian in the division of labour.

The tribal stage, with its three subdivisions, is itself followed by one of two alternatives: either by the stage of the city state or by feudalism. Which of these two occurs seems to depend, for Marx and Engels, on population density. They thus explain the rise of feudalism in Europe and the corresponding absence of city states as due to the fact that 'the different starting point was determined by the sparseness of the population at that time' (p. 45).

By contrast the ancient or classical stage, which was characterized by the city states of antiquity, arose as a result of several tribes coming together to form a city. In the city state although communal property continues as the dominant form of property, private property also takes a hold, because the 'class relation between citizens and slaves which

had appeared before, is now completely developed'. As before, exploitation and private property are seen as aspects of the same thing. As the city state continues to develop, private ownership becomes more and more concentrated in the hands of some of the citizens, but the division this gives rise to does not lead to the formation of classes among the freemen because they remain united against the slaves. The relation of slaves and freemen is, however, for Marx and Engels a true class relation.

More important for them is the other alternative which can follow the first primitive stage: feudalism. This is the system which they see as having replaced the Roman Empire in Europe. For Marx and Engels feudalism was based on a kind of dispersed slavery — serfdom - and therefore was really not all that different from die social system of the ancient city states. The one big difference lies in die fundamentally rural character of feudalism. This meant that the cities which ultimately grew up within this

rural society were of a different character from the surrounding countryside. While with the ancient city state there was a unity between town and country, since country settlements were really extensions of the city both in the type of economic activity which took place there and in the principles of social organization in the two places, this was not so under feudalism. The difference led to an important conflict between town and country. At first the freemen of both town and country had an organization and a type of property which still retained something of the communal as well as something of the private, but in the town a radical transformation was taking place.

This transformation was due first to the influx of runaway serfs into the towns which meant that labourers free from the personal ties of feudalism, but having no access to the means of production, became a dependent and exploitable group which was to become the proletariat. The proletariat are 'free' labourers in the sense that they can sell their labour to whoever will employ them, but are not free to do anything *but* sell their labour, since they have no access to the means of production: land, tools, workshops, raw materials. In a sense this 'freedom' is in fact total dependence and subordination to those who do control the means of production. This dependence contrasts with the dependence

of serfs or slaves in being non-personal and non-permanent. The contrast between the total but impersonal dependence of the proletariat and the personal dependence of the slave was an idea which Marx was to continue to develop in most of his later work. It is another of the key elements of his social analysis. Later Marx was to argue that the slave is in a sense less badly off than the 'free' labourer because the slave master has an interest in the health and welfare of the slave, since he owns him, but the capitalist has no such interest in his workers.

Associated with the growth of the proletariat in the towns of feudal times were other processes which together led to the concentration of the means of production in ever-fewer hands, a process which ultimately led to the capitalism of the nineteenth century. The important place of the analysis of the transition to capitalism in The *German Ideology* reminds us once again of the primarily political purpose of the anthropological and historical analysis. Although the discussion of this process is beyond the scope of this book we must not forget that the whole outline of history is sketched in The German *Ideology* for two purposes and

not for itself. The first such purpose is to show how capitalism and its institutions have been produced by history and how it will therefore be destroyed by history. The second purpose is to show how the beliefs and values which organize our society are produced by the history of the social formation.

This second purpose is dealt with not only in the brief account of evolution outlined above but by a philosophical discussion of the production of ideas in history which it is equally essential to understand for apprehending the Marxist attitude to history and anthropology. The starting point of this philosophical discussion is a rejection of the theories, such as those of Hegel and the young Hegelians, which saw ideas and institutions as the source of history, as though these existed apart from the natural processes of human production and reproduction. Marx and Engels argued that we must understand ideas as products of people engaged in this natural process and see the production of ideas as an aspect of the general enterprise of making a living from nature. This is the position known as materialism; it is

opposed to idealism which, in a broad sense, sees the basis of human existence as abstract spiritual concepts whose origin cannot be explained by natural circumstances. Idealism has a long history in philosophy, going back at least to the Irish philosopher Berkeley, and it is sometimes attributed, as it was by Marx, to Plato.

Marx's and Engels's rejection of idealism, however, is qualified in that they also reject the crude materialism which they saw manifested in the work of such writers as the German socialist Feurbach. If it is natural conditions of existence which are the basis of human history, this does not mean that human society and concepts are simply an automatic product or reflection of physical existence, as Feuerbach and other 'vulgar' materialists seem to imply. Marx's and Engels's position is always something of a balancing act between idealism and crude or 'vulgar' materialism and this is nowhere better illustrated than in The German *Ideology* and the Theses on Feurbach.

Human existence, for Marx and Engels, occurs in terms of people's concepts, which are incorporated in their mode of life and their subjective experience, but it is from man's interaction with nature and from the history of this interaction that these ideas, beliefs, and values are created in the first place. The argument runs like this: at any particular time people apprehend natural material circumstances through their ideas, and they

therefore act in terms of these ideas, beliefs, and values. Therefore, in history it is not nature and technology which makes human society but it is man himself, who in terms of his already existing ideas and values, makes his own history, as he encounters nature and the problems it poses. These already existing ideas and values are, however, themselves the product of previous encounters and answers to the challenge of nature. This means that the relation of ideas and practical problems can only be understood as part of the process of history. Ideas and concepts held by people are not therefore simply a reflection of how nature is at any particular time; they are the historical product of the need to organize society so that human beings in society can produce and reproduce. Ideas and concepts may thus be in fact misleading as to the real condition of existence; they are not

the *reflection* of the economic system but the product of a complex historical process of changing adaptation.

An illustration of the complex relationship, envisaged by Marx and Engels, between ideas and the process of production is offered by one of their central concerns: the representation of labour. According to them the capitalist representation of labour, the idea that labour is a thing which can be bought and sold, came about as a result of certain economic and technical developments in medieval towns. Later this representation was adopted as the dominant idea of what labour is, since such a concept makes the exploitation of people in capitalism possible. Though this idea was ultimately caused by economic and technical developments, and is in fact a misrepresentation of social relations, the idea is real enough to the people concerned. They see labour as something which can be bought and sold and, for them, that is all there is to it; when they use that idea of labour they are unaware of and unconcerned with what has caused it. Because of this their actions are in terms of their concept of labour and this idea of labour is therefore in itself an important causative factor in history. Similarly the attempt to reveal the falsity of this representation of labour by examining the history of its development is part of a revolutionary activity since it challenges the unquestionability of the dominant representation.

Marx's and Engels's materialism is thus not the denial of the importance of ideas, concepts, and values for people, like the materialism of Feuerbach, but an assertion that ideas ultimately have a material origin in the real conditions of existence, a history

which consists in a complicated interplay and conflict of different factors, some directly material, some mental {though material in origin). This interplay and this conflict are the driving forces of history; they are a process which Marx referred to by the word 'dialectic'. 'Dialectic' is a term which he borrows from Hegel but which he uses in a very different sense to Hegel's. Using the term 'dialectic' means that the process of movement which characterizes human history is not a smooth development but a development caused by conflicts and contradictions which lead to temporary resolutions, like two people arguing with each

other. It is by this process of conflict and contradiction, caused by a multiplicity of factors all arising from the natural conditions of existence, that history proceeds to the human condition and human ideas current at a particular moment.

In this way Marx and Engels give us an alternative to the idealist philosophies which they reject. Yet their theory does not underestimate either the power of ideas or the complexity of the process of their historical production.

Indeed a great part of *The German Ideology* is concerned with this process, which Marx and Engels discuss under the label of the origin of 'consciousness'. Their use of the word 'consciousness' refers to the system of meaning through which we apprehend the world, as well as the ideas, opinions, and beliefs which we are aware of holding. The two things are not the same, and, although Marx and Engels are not very clear, they do attempt to distinguish them. As we saw above, for them one of the commonest mistakes of the crude materialism which they criticize is to think that men deal with the world simply as it is; as it would be defined by physics or biology. This is not so, they argue, because we apprehend the world through a system of meaning which we have learned from others and of which language is an essential part. That does not mean that ideas and language come first. 'Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life'. (P. 47.) Consciousness, which is indissolubly linked to language, is itself a social product. It is moulded by the interaction of men together in history and by their dealing with nature, i.e. with plants, animals, their environment, and their own bodies. This process of interaction is for Marx and Engels both a source of conceptualization and also of a sort of natural religion, at least in the earlier stages of evolution. However for the periods they are concerned with, this first process is not all; as the relation of man to nature becomes

more complex through more advanced technology, they see another process coming into play.

Improved technology, according to Marx and Engels, leads to greater division of labour which leads to greater inequality and to private property and greater social differentiation. Now, since consciousness is

adapted to the practical needs of society and that society divides into subsocieties which have a different type of existence, it follows that these different subsocieties develop their own consciousness. In more complex societies and especially under capitalism these different sections of society—classes-dispose of different power, and because of this the dominant class is able to impose its own consciousness on the whole of society. As a result there ceases to exist unalloyed the direct feedback, characteristic of primitive societies, between natural conditions and consciousness. The consciousness of the dominant class is adapted to the need of operating the domination of this class. It is not an adaptation of society as a whole, and, Marx and Engels argue, it therefore has to hide the exploitation on which the dominant class relies. In this sense this imposed consciousness, is a false consciousness for those who are dominated, since it serves the purposes of the superiors but not of the inferiors. It hides from the inferiors the sources of domination and the process by which this has come about.

False consciousness is usually referred to by Marx by the term ‘ideology’ and that is how the word will be used in this book. The word ‘ideology’ is , however, also sometimes used to simply mean the system of concepts and ideas in general. The muddle that these two uses of the word cause is in part Marx’s and Engels’s fault because when they are talking about society based on communal property, that is, before false consciousness arises, they mean by ideology the total process of cognition including language, political ideas, social rules, etc., but when they are talking of class society where false consciousness is present they seem to mean by ideology something much more restricted: moral, political, and religious ideas and values. They do not discuss clearly whether in class society they consider all aspects of cognition to be moulded by false consciousness or only certain aspects. They are, however, quite clear that the State and the apparatus of the State, especially law, are some of the tools of the dominant class, and are therefore prime examples of false consciousness. Because of this, political ideas in class societies, ideas such as the sovereignty of the State

and the particular idea of justice embodied in law, are all manifestations of the imposition of the consciousness of the dominant class, because

they facilitate and hide class exploitation.

It is in this context that Marx and Engels finally turn the tables on the ideas of philosophers who, like Hegel, had argued about the primacy of ideas, especially the idea of the State, as though these ideas had formed the processes of history rather than the other way round. What Marx and Engels show is that since these ideas are examples of ideology, attributing to them causal primacy amounts to making them unquestionable, and to making the social[1] order which they legitimate and organize — capitalism - free from possible challenge. The very philosophy of the Hegelians is therefore not a challenge to society but a way of making such a challenge unthinkable. It is not a theory of history but a product of history designed to serve the purposes of the ruling class. It is a prime example of ideology.

The German *Ideology* is one of the main works where Marx and Engels developed an evolutionary theory for political ends, and it raises a whole range of questions, some of which, like that of the rise of false consciousness or ideology, they never treated systematically again. The book in other ways also reflects how little they had yet formulated a detailed evolutionary history of society. For the tribal stage, in particular, they base themselves only on the vaguest generalization as gathered probably from philosophical treatises. The *German* Ideology makes no detailed references to specific studies of primitive societies or to the work of anthropologists. Even the references to classical antiquity and feudalism remain vague and unspecific, although it is clear that, unlike their discussion of tribal society, these are based on much greater knowledge, obtained largely from the classical education they both shared. The German *Ideology* represents, therefore, a first foray into anthropology, which is important more because of its attempt to isolate such general problems as the relation between property and the State, the growth of consciousness, and the way material circumstances produce mental concepts than for specific formulations about the nature of pre-capitalist systems or the way the evolution of society had taken place. This Marx and Engels were to attempt to do in more detail in their subsequent works.

Most generally, *The German Ideology* is important as a turning point. Here Marx and Engels decided that the understanding of

man depends on the understanding of men in society and history, not on understanding philosophical controversy.

Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, 1857-6

The next work of Marx and Engels, after The German Ideology, to discuss the history of human society was The Communist Manifesto of 1848. Of course this famous pamphlet was a much more practical political publication than The German *Ideology* and it was written at a time of tremendous political ferment. It is not surprising that the references to the past it contains are very brief. Nevertheless, in the first part of The *Manifesto* there is renewed reference to the evolution of society. The central point of the system outlined in The German *Ideology* is spelled out particularly clearly: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.'

In contrast to The *German Ideology* reference to the tribal stage has been dropped but the centrality of class struggle remains. The emphasis on revolution as ending every stage is, also, much more definitely stated than in earlier works.

The most important aspect of these passing remarks in The Communist *Manifesto* however, have, already been discussed in the previous chapter. That is, they make crystal clear something which is implied in The German *Ideology,* that the history of mankind is governed by the same processes in all times, and that the main one of these processes is class conflict.

After The *Communist Manifesto,* the next elaboration of the overall evolutionary scheme of the history of pre-capitalist society comes in preliminary works by Marx, usually known as Grundrisse, written in 1858, ten years afer The *Manifesto.* In the interval much had happened to Marx and he was by then an exile in London in a place and a situation where inevitably he was more remote from the centres of

political action. As a result his writing becomes less concerned with immediate political concerns and he had much more time for reading and research. He was therefore

able to expand his studies in the way that was ultimately to produce *Capital,* his main theoretical work.

Grundrisse consists of a series of notebooks which were never finally prepared for publication and are therefore somewhat untidy and unsystematic. They contain much expansion, however, of the ideas found in the more finished work of that period: the three volumes of *Capital* and the short *Preface to a* Contribution *to the* Critique *of Political* Economy.

The most significant part of Grundrisse for our subject is that part which has been published separately in English under the title *Pre-Capitalist* Economic Formations together with a very valuable introduction by the historian E. Hobsbawm. Formen, as these notebooks are often called, offers the background to two of the most famous remarks in the whole of Marx's work. The first is the remark in Volume I of *Capital* that 'commodity exchange (a necessary prerequisite to capitalism) begins where community life ends'. The second is the statement of a clear evolutionary sequence in the *Preface to a* Contribution *to the Critique of Political* Economy, the work where Marx expresses (p. 83) most coherently his theory of history: 'In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modem bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society'.

If the evolutionary scheme given in the *Preface* seems absolutely clear and definite, this is not the picture which emerges from the less systematic Formen.

As in The German Ideology, we seem to start with a similar early evolutionary stage which is roughly described as 'tribal' and which in itself divided into three. The first substage of the tribal stage is hunting, of which Marx tells us practically nothing. It is intimately linked to the second substage, pastoralism, which, Marx believed, following the accepted view of the time-itself much influenced by Biblical sources — always preceded agriculture. Some sort of property already exists with

pastoralism, Marx tells us, although he modifies this elsewhere (p. 69). This property is, however, not conceptualized as somthing in itself (a kind of mystical link between people and things as it is with fully developed private property) because it remains only an aspect of the social relations of which the tribe consists. 'Property therefore means belonging to a tribe,' (p. 90) and even then it is not land which is property with pastoralists. 'What is *appropriated* and reproduced is here only the herd and not the soil which is always

used in temporary commonalty wherever the tribe breaks its wanderings.' (p. 89.)

With settled agriculture the situation is somewhat different in that land becomes communal property, especially because of the need to defend it from 'other tribes'. We are not dealing any more with temporary commonality but with permanent commonality. However, what concerns Marx most is to show just how different this type of communal property is to private property under capitalism. While under capitalism the owning and accumulating of property is seen as the aim of life, in tribal conditions property is simply seen as a necessary pre-condition of life and social relations. Being a member of a tribe and a kinsman to the other members of the tribe automatically implies having access to the means of production controlled by the community. The object of production under such circumstances is not to accumulate property but to make possible the continuation of the individual in society, since only as a member of society can one find meaning in human existence. This point is of course another criticism of the individualist philosophies of utilitarians and of economists who saw early man as a kind of lonely Robinson Crusoe trying to interact with nature in isolation and according to ideas and institutions which he had created on the spot.

The central concern of *Formen* is to understand what social relations and institutions can be like when they are not moulded by capitalism. Marx is continually facing a problem which is very familiar to anthropologists: how to express a different system with a vocabulary which is inevitably moulded to the institutions of the society in which it is normally used. This can be seen throughout Formen in his struggles with the word 'property', but that is only a beginning. What Marx is trying to construct in his imagination is what it would be to exist in such

a different type of society. Under capitalism the market and the desire to accumulate wealth appear to be a sufficient basis for social interaction and for regulating communal life; things and impersonal economic mechanisms have replaced people's commitment to each other while 'the ancient conception in which man always appears (in however narrowly national, religious or political a definition) as the aim of production, seems very much more exalted than the modern world in which production is the aim of man and wealth the aim of production' (p. 84).

The attempt to grasp this difference and to put it into words is a

recurrent theme of Formen, especially because the secondary theme is to understand the contradiction which arises when the two opposed conceptions of man occur in the same society in periods of transition. This is crucial because Marx was to go on to argue that capitalism grew out of one such combination in feudalism. In *Formen* Marx is mainly concerned with other contradictory combinations of incompatible social principles.

The first such combination to be considered is one which he calls the 'Germanic' mode of production, ('mode of production', in this work, meaning social evolutionary stage). It is not clear how it differs from the third tribal substage associated with settled agriculture. The Germanic mode of production is characterized by a society made up of largely independent family groups, each of which forms a basic and complete productive unit. These independent family groups come together in assemblies for such things as war, religion, and the settlement of disputes, but they do not really form an organic whole. The Germanic tribe is therefore based on shared locality rather than kinship, but it consists of a collection of kinship units each with access to a territory, thus 'individual landed property (of the different families) does not appear as a contradictory form to communal landed property, nor as mediated by the community but the other way round. The community exists only in the mutual relation of the individual landowners as such.' (P. 80 modified.)

What Marx wants to stress here is that although Germanic tribes form quite large groups of people they do not form any kind of community

with communal property, as was the case in the ancient city states; they are merely ad hoc agglomerates. This is particularly significant for Marx since it means that the communal principle does not fully come into conflict with the interests of individual constitutive families as it did in the ancient city, a contradiction which ultimately led to further developments. This Germanic organization remains extremely vague in Formen and the reason seems to come from the paucity and dubiousness of Marx's sources for the construction of this mode of production. In The German *Ideology* Marx had used Tacitus as his source for tribal German society, but by the time of Formen he became influenced by the nationalist and romantic nineteenth-century tradition of German historiography, a tradition which was to influence him even more later on, and which was to have a dramatic and harmful effect on Engels. This tradition stressed how true

Germanic society was still to be found in the organization of ancient local communities. It was egalitarian and free from the weakening and divisive influence of the Roman world and of urban society. Within the local community it had survived during the Middle Ages and even to a certain extent right up to the nineteenth century, in spite of a foreign overlay of feudal institutions coming from western and southern Europe. This romantic view of the Germanic commune had an unconscious effect on Marx and led him to follow those German historians who were trying to reconstruct an old system which they saw as smothered by a newer one. Whatever the historical value of such a procedure, and it was slight, it inevitably produced a rather shadowy type of society owing more to nationalist imagination than to recorded facts.

A similar romantic nationalist tradition was also developing in Russia and it too seems to have influenced Marx. As a result, as Hobsbawm points out, Marx seems to half suggest the existence of yet another mode of production — the Slavonic. On this Marx has almost nothing to say. The rather dubious sources for these two modes of production explains the fact that the German and the Slavonic (if there is one) are characterized by a name denoting an ethnic or linguistic group and not a relation of production, as is the case for the capitalist mode of production. This procedure goes against Marx's general practice of characterizing modes of production as systems irrespective of place and people. In any case, neither the Germanic nor the Slavonic mode

of production was of much significance for Marx's and Engels's later work, and the same is true for most Marxist studies.

As does *The* German *Ideology,* Formen makes ample reference to the ancient or classical type of society based on the city state. Here again the main focus is the contradiction between communal property and the growth of individual property. This includes a discussion of slave labour which both echoes The *German Ideology* and foreshadows the discussion to be found in *Capital.* Again as in *The German Ideology* we have an elaborate consideration of the growth of classes in ancient Rome and the differentiation between plebians and patricians. Marx in this section was strongly influenced by the great German historian Niebuhr, whom he quotes, but there is little more development of the ideas outlined in The German *Ideology.*

The one clear innovation in Formen, however, is the introduction

of another type of social system variously referred to as the Asiatic, or oriental mode of production. This stage is also mentioned in several other works by Marx, above all in *Capital.* This innovation is especially significant as it suggests that Marx did not believe there was necessarily one set scheme of evolution which applied for the whole of Mankind, the view which was held implicitly by most of Marx's contemporaries. They believed that peoples had to go from one stage to another with mechanical regularity and in predictable order. Whether Marx held such a view or not has had great importance for later Marxist polemics, and we shall return to this question. The introduction of the Asiatic mode of production in Formen shows well that Marx remained flexible throughout his work when he came across new information. Not only was Marx willing to accept that historical development might have followed several different lines in different places but it also shows that he was always revising his ideas. In particular the reader of Marx's works must get the feeling that he gradually became aware of the overly Eurocentric character of the earlier schemas he had espoused in such works as The *German Ideology.* As his work progressed he read more and more about non-European societies and modified his general historical views accordingly. What he considered essential was the systematic relationship between the organization of production, the development of

classes, and the type of property which he was sketching out in Formen, not any particular version of human history.

In the case of the Asiatic mode of production the source of the information which led him to introduce this new type of society is well documented. In the period between the writing of The *German* Ideology and *Capital,* Marx made a living in great part by contributing articles to a radical American newspaper, The New York *Daily* Tribune. These articles were commentaries on world affairs and, given the events of the time, they often concerned the colonial activities of European powers, principally Britain. Marx therefore concerned himself extensively with what was happening in China, Indonesia, and India. Writing these articles increased Marx's interest in the nature of these societies and it is clear that he read widely, especially about India. This interest is something which he continued to the end of his life, as witnessed by his increasing knowledge of India and to a lesser extent of China. By the time Marx wrote Formen he had not yet read Maine and

Phear, who were to influence him later, but he had read descriptive accounts of Indian and Indonesian village life and history, especially in Sir Thomas Raffles, History *of Java* (1817), M. Wilks, Historical Sketches *of* the South *of* India (181Q-17), and G. Campbell, Modern India (1852), all of which are quoted in *Capital.* (See the discussion of Marx's sources in L. Krader, The Asiatic Mode *of* Production (1975).) To this information about Asia Marx added knowledge of the Inca which he had gathered from Prescott's famous study, The Conquest *of Peru,* a remarkable book which came out in 1847 and whose instant fame had a dramatic impact on nineteenth-century thought. Marx, like his contemporaries, seems to have been much struck by the description of a huge empire run without the aid of literacy but held together by a mixture of ruthless military power and religion. Generally he seems to have synthesized die Inca to the oriental data, and he uses information from Prescott to explain the working of the 'Asiatic' mode of production.

The Asiatic mode of production is characterized by the importance of the State and the place of the State in the conceptualization of property. The Asiatic system consists of separate units; local communities which hold land communally in much the same way as tribal communities or the constituent units of the classical and feudal systems were believed

by Marx to do. What differentiates the Asiatic system is that while in the ancient or feudal systems the community sees itself as a fundamental unit and as the holder of its common property, in the oriental case it does not. The individual communities consider the State as the true owner of the land they cultivate in common. This means that although the State is an external, exploitative body it is not seen as such by the people who, on the contrary, see it as a kind of beneficient organism which 'gives' them the land on which they depend. In such circumstances it is not surprising that the State is actually worshipped either in the person of a ruler or in a god which it incarnates. The ruler appears 'as the father of all the numerous and other lesser communities' (p. 69). Because the ruler takes on such an exalted role, his power is unchallengeable and he is therefore a despot. In this way the local communities can continue as collective organic wholes yet their continuing existence does not challenge, as it would in other systems, the external dictatorial force of the State.

What Marx was trying to do in constructing the Asiatic system

was to reconcile, on the one hand the reports of the strength of the village communities which characterized many of the accounts of Asian villages and which was manifested in their apparent ability to act organically, for example in the close co-operation and mutual reasonableness required in irrigated agriculture, and, on the other hand, a traditional view of the despotism of oriental rulers, a view which dominated European pictures of the Orient, at least since the time of Montesquieu. Marx's theory is an attempt to accept both types of accounts of the Orient and to explain the apparent unity of states often made up of previously independent units which nevertheless co-operated in great communal works such as road building (among the Inca) and large-scale irrigation (in Asia).

According to Marx's theory the many different units were willing to unite and contribute their labour to work for the despot because this appeared, not as working for him, but as working for 'the higher unity', which, they wrongly believed, was the source of their continued existence. In this way, because the despot has taken onto himself the attributes of the community, work — which was in fact done for him— appeared as work by him, and he appeared as the creator of wealth for

the community. This theory of the Asiatic mode of production is complicated and subtle; it is hardly elaborated in Formen but it is fascinating in that it foreshadows a central concept in *Capital.* In *Capital* Marx argues that as a result of the peculiar history of capitalism, the capitalist, who is really a parasite on the workers, is represented as though he were the opposite; as the source of production and the benefactor of the workers. This is because, in the image of the world created by capitalism, the ability to supply capital is seen as enabling production to take place and as giving a wage to workers who would otherwise starve, while in fact it is really the capitalist who depends on the worker. This 'inverted causation' as it has been called, which is a major element of Marxist theory, is to be found in the theory of Asiatic production, in that the subjects of the Asiatic despot are made to believe that they can live because of the blessing of the god-king, the true guardian and shepherd of the community, while really it is he who is living off them.

Another important aspect of Marx's notion of the Asiatic mode of production is that it offers an explanation of what he saw as the surprising stability of Asian states. In his writings on the colonial situation in China and India, Marx was puzzled by the fact that, although both these countries seemed to have reached a

higher state of civilization than Europe in earlier times, they were in his time being overtaken by Europe, as the colonial conquests showed. Why had these Asiatic societies stopped developing and allowed these conquests to take place?

The idea of the unchanging east was widespread in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century thought and it seems that Marx accepted this view, although it has subsequently been shown to be misleading. This unchangeability was particularly puzzling for Marx since the basis of his writing on pre-capitalist society was, as we have seen, the contradiction between communal and private property and between the social systems these implied. In his discussion of the ancient city states, as in his discussion of feudalism, the contradiction between these two systems had been identified as the driving force of change. How then was it possible that a similar contradiction in the social formations of India, China, and Peru had not led to similar

development? The problem raised by this theoretical paradox was of significance not only for these particular instances, however important they were in themselves; it was in fact a challenge to the whole theoretical edifice which Marx and Engels were constructing. Marx found the answer to this problem in his belief that, in the Asiatic system, the community is not broken up by the growth of private property and internal differentiation, as happens in classical city states or in feudalism, because the integrity of the community is maintained centrally by the State itself. Because the State represents the essence of the community, in people's minds, it is in the interests of the State to maintain the communities, and not to destroy them, as is the case in the feudal system. This means that the State helps the community in resisting the amassing of wealth in the hands of a few members, because of the disruptive implications of such a process. This maintains the stability of the local communities since the disruptive process of class formation is halted—a stability which contrasts sharply with the political flux and intrigue of the court. This point Marx made much more explicitly in *Capital,* Book 1 (378-9): 'The simplicity of the productive organism in these self-sufficient communities - which continually reproduce their kind, and, if destroyed by chance, reconstruct themselves in the same locality and under the same name - this simplicity unlocks for us the mystery of the unchangeableness of Asiatic society, which contrasts so strongly with the perpetual dissolutions and reconstructions of Asiatic states.' Because the communities are so stable in relation to a centre which is largely

in their imagination, it matters little whether in fact the real centre is itself actually in turmoil. 'Thus the structure of the economic elements of the society (the local communities) remains unaffected by the ups and downs in the political weather. ' (P. 392.)

Formen contains many of the elements of Marx's evolutionary theory concerning pre-capitalist systems, and it also contains much about the more immediate origins of capitalism. None the less the overall evolutionary picture remains vague. Hobsbawm sees the main theme as a mapping of various alternative evolutionary routes in the history of mankind. Other writers see it in a much more systematic unilineal sequence. I personally doubt whether any clear evolutionary picture would emerge if we were to baSte ourselves simply on Formen. The

reason is not simply the preliminary nature of the manuscript. Rather, the reason is that, in Formen, Marx was not principally concerned with establishing an evolutionary sequence, as Engels was to do later on, and as he himself briefly attempted in the *Preface to a* Critique *of the* Political *Economy.* The notebooks from which *Formen* comes form the part of Grundrisse concerned with the understanding of capitalism. The central core of Formen is really an attempt to answer fundamental preliminary questions for Marx's theory of capital: what is property when it is not property as visualized in the particular formulation of capitalism? How are social relations visualized and operated when they are not moulded by the impersonal ideology of capitalism?

In The German *Ideology,* Marx had hypothesized that the concepts with which, in capitalist society, we understand such things as the State, law, and property are moulded for the purpose of domination. Once this had been established, the aim of Marx's work was to break through this veil of ideology. Then, in *Capital,* Marx attempts to break through and out of the veil of economic ideology, and he does this by showing that the way the economy is usually talked about hides the real basis of society and serves to maintain the exploitation on which it rests. In order to show this Marx explains die simultaneous growth of both the ideology and the social system of capitalism. *Capital* is thus not only a political critique of society but it is also a critism of the terms in which the economy was discussed at the time when he wrote, and a demonstration that these terms are moulded to the purposes of the system they pretend to analyse. This is done in part by an analysis of history and this is the technique that Marx is using in Formen.

In the case of Formen, Marx is trying to break through the

capitalist concept of property. In many ways he is only partly successful. We have noted some contradictions in his attempt and we shall return to others. The problem seems to be in part that the sheer imaginative effort of thinking about totally different systems on the basis of very sketchy information is too great. The other problem is terminological and is a problem familiar to anthropologists. It is the problem of talking in our own terms about systems based on other rationales than our own, adapted as these terms are to our own system.

Marx tries to get away from the idea of private property when discussing pre-capitalist social systems by using the phrase ‘appropriation of nature’ but in doing so he uses a word with the same root as ‘property’.

Marx’s concern in Formen with defining two types of existence and two types of property is, however, not limited to establishing a contrast. This is not the focus of these notebooks, and in that they are very different from The Origin *of the Family, Private Property and the State.* Marx is concerned here with the *dynamic* implication of the contradiction of combining two systems. Already in *The* German *Ideology,* and even more in *Capital,* Marx saw the forward movement of history as due to the conflict between private property and communal property. In Formen Marx is also considering under what circumstances this conflict is made inoperative, hence his consideration of the Asiatic mode of production and the Germanic mode of production. In many ways these are constructed simply as a qualification to his general theory of history.

If this anthropological effort is what emerges most clearly from the Formen, we must not forget that it is here, as in all Marx’s work, for a political purpose. First of all, it is, as we have seen, part of the theoretical study of the emergence of capitalism, a historical study which serves to reveal its nature. Secondly, it is an attempt to understand historically the formative relationships between class structure, political institutions, and property, as they operate in time. This is not just an academic concern but part of the work of understanding how and when capitalism will change and be overcome.

There is a third political aim which emerges from Formen, and which is clearer here than in any other of Marx’s writings. Marx seems to be answering unnamed conservative critics who would argue that if you do not have private property and the politico-legal framework to ensure its enjoyment you will have chaos;

people would lose all incentive to produce, there would be no law except the law of the strongest, the economy could not be organized, there would be no individual security, murder and theft would be the order of the day. This point of view was of course almost universally

accepted in the nineteenth century, and is repeated endlessly. It is a point of view which is still prevalent. By contrast, Marx shows that other systems, working on different assumptions, can exist, and this for him implies that future change to a radically different social system is therefore also possible. If society in all its aspects has always been in a state of flux, it is highly unlikely that this process will end at any particular time. Here we return to property again, since what Marx seems to be stressing above all, in his discussion of other systems, is that, without the particular formulation of private property which dominates capitalist institutions, an ordered life is still possible. Production does not stop when it stops being an end in itself. People do work without the institutional system of capitalism and they are assured of a reasonable livelihood. This conclusion, very obvious to historians and anthropologists, was a dramatic and difficult point to put over in a society which rejected this possibility as one of the first principles.

The Origin *of the* Family, Private Property and the State, *1884*

Formen is the most detailed discussion of pre-capitalist society in Marx's mature work and it really cannot be understood except as a part of the background for the more fully completed works Marx was either planning or did write, especially *Capital. Capital* refers again and again to the themes of Formen. The famous Chapter 5 of the first book, which deals with the transformation of labour from a stage where it is a 'part of life' to a stage under capitalism when it takes on the imaginary form of a thing separate from the labourer, when it can be bought and sold, is worked out in *Formen,* in the discussion of tribal, oriental, and ancient societies which it contains.

None the less it is clear that Marx felt that before he could complete a book on pre-capitalist societies, he had to find out much more about these societies and their transformations. The last years of his life seem to have been largely given over to this task. During this last period, Marx made detailed studies of the work of historians and lawyers who discussed traditional peasant communities, whether in Europe or in Asia, and above all he

studied the work of contemporary anthropologists who discussed primitive societies.

One reason for this increase in interest on the part of Marx is the wealth of new publications and theories which followed the assimilation by anthropologists of Darwin's discoveries. The other reason is more political. From about 1864 on, much of Marx's time and energy was spent in connection with the setting up of the international association of working men, the first International. As an indirect result of this association's stormy history, Marx came across socialist revolutionaries from parts of the world about which he knew relatively little. One of these areas was Russia, especially because the interest that his work had aroused there made him consider the previously unthinkable possibility of a communist revolution occurring in that country. Marx's ideas about Russia have for obvious reasons been discussed extensively, but this has significance for Marx's anthropology in two ways. The first is that the possibility of a revolution occurring in a country where capitalism was poorly developed made him aware of the problem of setting up too rigid a sequence for human evolution. Clearly, if a communist revolution was to take place in a country like Russia, the historical stage marked by capitalism would in great part have been skipped. Did this mean that the historical sequence so far set up had to be modified to accommodate much more variety, and was the specifically European focus of the scheme in some way too parochial?

The second way in which the discussion of Russia is significant for the relation of Marxism and anthropology is that Marx's interest in traditional peasant communities became less theoretical and more practical, as he considered the possibility of the Russian peasant commune becoming a base for a future revolution. This concern was linked with Marx's anthropological work, as made clear in a famous letter to the Russian socialist Vera Zasulich. In the second draft of this letter Marx says: 'the archaic formation of society reveals a number of different types which characterise different and successive epochs. The Russian village community belongs to the youngest type in this chain,' (Hobsbawm, 142-3), and in the same letter Marx goes on to refer to an 'all American author' as one of his authorities for such a statement. This author was Lewis Henry Morgan, and Marx's reference to him in such

a letter shows how his concern with anthropology was becoming central.

Marx's concern with anthropology towards the end of his life thus blended, as always, the political and the scholarly. His detailed study of the writing of anthropologists was clearly intended to be the basis of a future publication. In fact his death made this unrealizable, although Engels's book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,* based as it is on Marx's notes, was intended to be the one that Marx was unable to write. Because Marx never did write this anthropological work, it is futile to speculate too much on how his position would have been different from that of Engels.

We do know what came from Marx in The Origin because we possess Marx's notes on some of the anthropological works he examined, and these notes contain passages later incorporated into Engels's book. The notes are mainly extracts and comments on Morgan's *Ancient Society,* H. S. Maine's Lectures on *the Early History of Institutions,* which deals in large part with Irish history, J. B. Phear's The Aryan *Village* in India and *Ceylon,* and The Origin *of Civilization* by Sir John Lubbock. It is also clear from the notebooks that Marx had read much more widely than that. These notes are largely extracts and only contain a limited amount of comment. They have been admirably edited by L. Krader. In spite of their inevitably unsatisfactory character they reveal a number of points of importance.

First of all, one of the most striking aspects of the notes is the interest Marx shows in detailed ethnographic description. It is remarkable how this interest extends even to topics which do not seem related to the main themes of his studies. Secondly, the notes show Marx's enthusiasm for the work of Morgan. This is especially noticeable in that Marx is highly critical of Maine, Phear, and Lubbock wherever any of these three express ideas which conflict with Morgan' views. He is especially critical of their views about the historical primacy of group marriage and the gens (see below), because they were all three in different ways followers of Morgan's rival, McLennan. They refused to accept Morgan's assertion that the gens and group marriage were characteristic of the earlier human societies. The gens was the communal group which Marx, following Morgan, considered

as ante-dating all known history. It is clear that for Marx the ‘discovery’ of the gens was probably the most important of Morgan’s contribution to anthropology. The gens for Morgan is a grouping within which marriage is communal and where children

and wives are pooled. It is a group based on matrilineal descent, which means that one belongs to the group because one’s mother belonged to it and not because of the identity of the father, since this cannot be known. The gens for Morgan is the source from which both later kinship systems and later political systems evolved. For Marx, what was most important in the gens is that it was a group based totally on communal principles, where individuality and selfishness did not exist and where private property had not begun to appear.

While Morgan is especially interested in the gens as a stage in the history of kinship which predates the appearance of the family, and which shows that matrilineal descent preceded patrilineal descent, Marx stresses rather its significance as proof of the existence of organizing principles (especially as regards property) which were opposite to those of capitalism. Marx seems to suggest that the gens can actually co-exist with *de-facto* familial groupings and stable sexual relationships, but these familial groupings are not the basis of political and economic organization, and so the ‘constitution’ of the tribe remains communal. This is what matters for Marx, and he seems cautious about the primitive promiscuity hypothesized by Morgan. It is a position which, interestingly enough, is much more acceptable to modern anthropology than to that of Morgan and Engels, who both stress emphatically the sexual aspect of the gens.

Marx’s main quarrel with writers such as Maine is that they see the communal aspect of the descent group as growing out of the expansion of the family. For Maine, as the family expands into a descent group, the property it held before on an individual basis becomes communal property simply because the descent group is a ‘larger family’. Marx therefore sees Maine as arguing that private property is the original form of appropriation and that communal property is a later development. Marx sees such an argument as a subtle legitimation of private property as it existed in his time, because it makes it basic to human nature. In arguing against the notion that the family is the origin

of society, Marx and Engels reverse what they had argued in their previous writing, but Maine's version of this argument, which gives priority to private property, is even more opposed to their general position, and so it is not surprising that they reject Maine in favour of Morgan. By doing this Marx committed, if not himself, at least Engels and many Marxists, to a particular view of the evolution of

kinship which was disastrously wrong. However, he may well have made the wrong choice for the right reason. That is because, even though Maine might have been a better guide than Morgan concerning the evolution of kinship, Morgan was a much better guide than Maine concerning the evolution of property. As Marx rightly comments in his notebook, Maine seems unable to imagine property in terms other than the legal terms which his training had given him.

This discussion of the primacy of communal property is a point central to Marx's whole work, and the pleasure he found in its confirmation in the work of Morgan seems to me to be the only really clear element to emerge from the notebooks. I would, however, refer the reader who wants to know more to Krader's excellent introduction.

Engels's The Origin *of the* Family, *Private Property and the State* was published in 1884, the year after Marx's death, and (on p.71) the preface to the first edition begins thus: 'The following chapters are, in a sense, the execution of a bequest'. Engels saw the book as being what Marx would have written had he lived, and where-ever possible he uses quotations from Marx's notebooks. The book is in great part a 'presentation' of Morgan's Ancient Society, but as Engels points out there is much in it which goes beyond Morgan, in terms both of documentation and interpretation. One very significant change from Morgan we can attribute to Marx. Morgan'9 work is divided into four parts: (1) The growth of intelligence through inventions and discoveries, which deals in great part with agricultural technology; (2) the growth of the idea of government, which is mainly a discussion of descent groups and how they ultimately give way to state organization, particularly the Roman state; (3} the growth of the idea of the family, largely a discussion of types of marriage and types of kinship terminology; and finally (4) the growth of the idea of property. Marx in his notes changes this order and brings the discussion of property forward into the

discussion of descent groups and family organization, while he keeps the discussion of the rise of the State till last. This new order accords with the logic of Marx's thinking, as we have seen it in all the works we have discussed so far. It also forms the basis of the organization of Engels's book.

If Engels's book seems in many important ways to follow the lead of Marx's later works there are also some differences. One such difference is largely a matter of emphasis but it seems to me

of significance. In the notebooks Marx explains the difference in nature between the descent group, (the gens) and the family. The family in early times for Marx belongs to the private domain, rather than to the public and political. Only after a time do the principles on which the family is based—private property and slavery—come into conflict with the community and its commonality; this occurs only when the family begins to move into the political domain. Marx focuses on the dynamic implications of the conflicting principles which the simultaneous existence of the two institutions, family and descent group, implies. He is less interested in the evolutionary sequence of Morgan, which stresses the matrilineal gens and the nuclear family as two different stages. What matters for him is the conflict which arises from their combination. Engels, by contrast, follows Morgan much more closely, not only in terms of Morgan's schemes but also in terms of Morgan's emphasis.

An overall difference of impression between Marx's notes and Engels's book is that in the case of the notebooks Morgan's framework is totally subordinated to Marx's wider concerns, while in Engels's book we get the impression that Morgan, for great chunks of the book, actually takes over Engels. This leads Engels to enthusiastically participate in rather technical debates such as the significance of kinship terminology, or the details of Australian Aboriginal society, details which Marx had largely left alone. This is somewhat ironical in that, as we shall see, it is Engels's anthropological enthusiasm and his trust in Morgan which has been the source of many of the points in his work which appear now as unacceptable to anthropologists and which have been the cause of some of the most damaging objections to his theories.

Overall Engels seems to go much further in his enthusiasm for Morgan than the generally vague impression we get from Marx. Marx uses Morgan principally as a source about exotic societies. He does note, in the letter to Zasulich, Morgan's hope for a future society, which would abandon the obsession with private property, but at the same time he makes it clear that he rightly does not consider Morgan a socialist or a revolutionary. Engels, on the other hand, states in the preface to the first edition of The Origin that 'Morgan in his own way had discovered afresh in America the materialistic conception of history, discovered by Marx forty years ago, and in his comparison of barbarism and civilization it had led him, in the main points, to the same conclusions as Marx'

(p. 71). This is high praise indeed from Engels but there is no hint in any of Marx's own writing of that degree of endorsement for Morgan's theoretical position.

The Origin falls into three parts. The first, represented by Chapter 1, deals with technological evolution. The second, represented by Chapter 2, the longest chapter in the book, deals with the development of the family and kinship systems, while the third, Chapters 3-4, deals with the evolution of the State. It is the first and second parts which follow Morgan most closely.

The first part lists three stages of human evolution from the earliest to the most recent: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. In this classification Morgan, and Engels after him, were following a very widely accepted schema of their time which, as we have seen, had already been used, albeit somewhat differently, by Marx. Savagery itself was again subdivided into three substages. First, there was a lower substage of savagery characterized by the gathering of wild plants and honey. Secondly, there was a middle substage characterized by fishing and the introduction of fire, and thirdly an upper substage characterized by hunting and improved tools. Barbarism, similarly, is divided into three substages but in this case the stages are not seen as universal, since according to Engels, they differed in the old and the new world. The lower substage of barbarism is common and is marked by the discovery of pottery, but the middle substage is marked by agriculture and the domestication of plants in

the new world, and by pastoralism and the domestication of animals in the old. The upper substage is marked by the discovery of iron smelting and the invention of alphabetic writing. It is the substage to which the Homeric poems belong.

This first part of the book, although it follows Morgan closely, also reflects Marx's and Engels's earlier schemes, apart from the distinction between the evolution in the Eastern and Western hemispheres. The next chapter, dealing with the history of marriage, is, however, totally new. There is nothing like it in either The German *Ideology* or Formen.

In this second part Engels not only follows Morgan's sequence, he follows Morgan's method concerning three key points.

The first method is one which Morgan shared with all of his contemporaries. He thought that if people such as the Iroquois of North America practised a particular type of agriculture it could be assumed that their institutions were die same as those of long

dead prehistoric peoples who had a similar level of technology. This meant that although the Iroquois might be observed contemporaneously with nineteenth-century European society, they could, none the less, be considered as a source of information about European society several thousand years before.

The second method was more peculiar to Morgan and was to be the source of many controversies in his time. Morgan's interest in anthropology had begun when he noticed the systematic pattern created by the totality of the terms used to refer to relatives and kinsmen. These patterns varied from language to language, but only a limited number of such patterns seemed to occur, so that the same pattern of kinship terminology was found among totally unrelated peoples speaking totally unrelated languages. Morgan was not interested in the terms for themselves but in the principles which they seemed to reveal when they were put together. For example, he would have been interested in die fact that the English word 'uncle' can be used in speaking both of one's mother's brother and one's father's brother while in Swedish, for instance, two different words are used. Furthermore, Morgan was interested in the patterns which kinship

terms create, not just for themselves but because he believed they reflected the system of marriage with which they had originally been used. If in a particular language a woman referred to a large number of men other than her husband by the same term as the one she used for her husband, this implied, for Morgan and Engels, that in an earlier stage of this system, a woman would have been wife to all of these men. Similarly if in a language a woman referred to her son by the same term as she used for the son of her sister, this showed that the system of terms developed at a time when the two sisters would have been co-wives of the same man or men. This combination of system of kin terms and marriage is referred to in Engels's book as the system of 'consanguinity'. For Engels, therefore, the study of systems of kin terms revealed previously existing systems of consanguinity and could be used as evidence for the history of kinship and social organization.

The third method Engels accepted from Morgan concerned the idea that, although systems of kinship terms were first moulded by systems of marriage, the kin terms did not change as easily as the system of marriage. This meant that systems of kin terms often reflected, not the present state of affairs, but the previous one. By looking at the kinship terms of a society one could therefore know

by this means what had been the previous kinship system, practised in the past by the people concerned.

By the use of these three methods Morgan believed he had the means with which to discover the history of marriage in human societies. After studying large numbers of systems of kinship terms and placing them in an evolutionary sequence, partly in terms of their characteristics, partly in terms of the technological level reached by the societies from which they originated, Morgan felt confident that he had discovered a governing tendency in the history of human marriage: as social evolution progressed, the number of legitimate sexual partners a man or a woman could have diminished progressively, finally producing monogamy - the permanent union of one man and one woman. This also meant that at the opposite pole of this evolutionary sequence there had existed a stage which was the exact opposite, a stage when men or women paired freely with whoever they took a fancy to, irrespective of any rules or regulations. Even the rule of

incest, Morgan and Engels argued, was a subsequent innovation. The first stage became of central importance for the work of both Morgan and Engels.

Neither Morgan nor Engels denied that he had no direct evidence at all for this first primeval stage of total promiscuity. Engels discusses certain objections to Morgan's scheme, especially the presence of long-term pairing among animals, but he argues that such evidence from non-human animals is irrelevant to human systems. (Actually his dismissal of this type of evidence as not being relevant to institutions is one many anthropologists would agree with.) The first stage however remains nothing more than an extrapolation from the overall pattern of evolution Morgan believed he had discovered.

The evidence for the next higher stage is not entirely absent but, in this case, it is indirect. This stage, according to Morgan and Engels, is marked by the limiting of pairing to one generation only. Sexual relations between generations become incestuous, but sexual relations within the same generation are totally free. The evidence for this is the system of kinship terms which Morgan found in various parts of the world. One such example given is Polynesia, and the evidence depends on the fact that in Polynesian kinship terminology, only differences of generation and sex are recognized, so that all males of the generation directly preceding one's own are referred to by one and the same word, which was

glossed by Morgan as 'father'; similarly, all females of this same generation are referred to by one term, which can be glossed as 'mother'. It was on the basis of this kind of observation that Morgan decided that there once existed in Polynesia a social order when sexual relations within one generation were so unspecific that all men of the ascending generation were 'fathers' and all women of the ascending generation were 'mothers'. This was because no-one could be sure who exactly within this group begot him.

According to the theory, the people who used such a system of terms did not themselves, however, practise such a type of marriage but actually practised the next stage. This was because according to Morgan kin terms lag behind. As a result, the evidence for this second

stage in the history of marriage depends entirely on the two assumptions which we have already noted. One that patterns of kin terms indicate types of marriage, and second, that the presence of such a pattern is a guide to a *previous* state of affairs.

The Polynesians, according to this way of seeing things, had a system of kinship terms which indicated, not the marriage system which they practised, but the marriage system which they had practised in the past.

The system of marriage which the Polynesians *actually* practised was, Morgan, and therefore Engels, believed, more advanced or, in other words, more restrictive, and represented the third stage in the evolution of marriage. This was a system in which, not only were members of one's own generation the only legitimate sexual partners, but not even all of these, since people who were descendants of the same ancestors could not marry. These co-descendants of one's ancestors considered themselves as brothers and sisters and would not marry each other but only members of another similar group of co-descendants. As a result all the men of one group would marry all the women of another. Group marriaiges would therefore occur when one group married another. One of the results of group marriage was that people shared amongst themselves a large number of spouses. Even though one was a long way from primitive promiscuity, binding individual marriage had not yet appeared.

The evidence for this stage, Morgan and Engels believed, was stronger than for the first two stages. First, and as before, there was evidence of this stage from kinship terminologies. The ter-

urinologies which demonstrated the existence of this stage, again did not come from those people who were belived to practise the associated form of marriage. Once more it was the terms used by people such as the Iroquois, who were believed to have moved on from this stage, who provided the evidence for its previous existence. Secondly, this third stage, was also vouched for by much more direct evidence. Morgan and Engels believed that there were several peoples who still practised group marriage. Engels, especially in subsequent editions of *The* Origin, was keen to

incorporate new evidence for contemporary practises of what he believed was group marriage. For example, he did this by quoting two anthropologists, Fison and Howitt, who wrote about Australian Aborigines in terms which could be construed as meaning that large groups of men married large groups of women.

This third stage in the history of marriage was of crucial importance for The Origin. This is because the group of people descended from a common ancestor, which married as a group another group, was the famous gens. For Marx and Engels the gens was the typical communal unit containing no internal differentiation as regards property or wives. It was the community in its purest form, the antithesis to the divisive individualism of capitalism. Its existence demonstrated for Engels that Marx had been right in arguing that commonality was the oldest form of social existence. The fact that, for Morgan at least, this commonality extended to spouses only added spice to the whole picture.

The absence of individual marriages led Morgan to the view that in such a society a person must belong to the gens of the mother, not the gens of the father, because with such a system of marriage you could never be sure who your father was. The gens had therefore to be a matrilineal group; that is, a group to which you belong by claiming descent in the female line. Furthermore, Engels and Morgan believed that matriliny had another, more important, implication; that is, it implied matriarchy or rule by women. In stressing this, Engels was clearly strongly influenced not only by Morgan but also by Bachofen whom he praised in his preface to the book. Both Bachofen and Morgan believed that, since you belonged to the group by virtue of being your mother's son, women in such a system must have a particularly high status. Engels, however, does not completely follow Bachofen in the belief that at this stage women were actually superior to men. What Engels stresses is that women were not inferior.

The assertion of the existence of the totally communal gens at an early stage in the history of mankind was what drew Marx and Engels to Morgan. They were so enthusiastic in the demonstration of the primacy of communal property and equality that they had no difficulty in taking in from Morgan much baggage which seems pretty unrelated to their previous concern; for example, such ideas as matriliny or the

significance of kinship terminology. More important, however, is the central fact that in the elevation of the place of the gens in their system, they consummated the fatal union between what we have called their *rhetorical* and their *historical* use of anthropology.

In the previous chapter we saw how anthropology was sometimes used by them to show the historical particularity of institutions which under capitalism were represented as eternal. Thus, quite justifiably, Marx and Engels used anthropological examples to show that private property or the State is not a necessary institution for human beings. For this purpose Marx and Engels had to show just how *different* primitive societies were from the type of society their readers knew. However, when they were discussing the historical development which led to capitalism, as they do in *The* German Ideology and Formen, they stress, by contrast, the continuity in structure between different stages and the universality of the historical process. On the other hand, the stage represented by the gens in The Origin, a stage which owes something to Morgan and something to Engels, represents the coming together of the rhetorical and the historical. The gens is there to demonstrate the possibility of a *totally* communal classless stage based on *totally different* principles to those of capitalism, but which, Engels claims, actually represents a state of affairs which had existed, and for which there is historical evidence. In fact, as we shall see, this evidence has proved largely illusory, but the presentation of the gens stage as a real historical one presents Engels right from the first with the theoretical difficulties which were to plague Marxist anthropology afterwards.

The problem is that, as we have seen, the Marxist theory of society depends on a contradiction between conflicting principles and on a conflict between different classes. This means that when Engels postulated a pre-class stage when there were no conflicting principles and everything was sweetness and light, he had no Marxist way by which to explain historical change. This had not been so with the earliest stages as drawn in The German *Ideology*

or Formen because even here Marx talks of ‘slavery being inherent in the family’ and of the universality of class relations.

When Engels therefore tries to explain the passage from the second stage to the gens stage he has no theoretical tools to deal with this, and he lamely has to echo Morgan and to explain the passage in Darwinian terms dealing with natural selection. According to this theory the earlier generational pairing was abandoned because it led to so much inbreeding that people who practised the gens system were genetically more fit for natural selection and therefore survived better. Such an explanation, quite apart from being completely wrong, is extraordinary in the light of the fact that both Marx and Engels warn throughout their work that biological models are inappropriate to human societies. What it does show, is just how much of a theoretical problem Engels had created for himself in creating this highly problematical gens stage of history where there were no class divisions of any kind.

The stage of the matrilineal gens was associated by Morgan and Engels with the higher stage of savagery. The passage to the next stages was, however, to be governed by totally different principles. In fact it is the passage out of the gens stage which is the subject matter of the book. This is the origin of the family, private property and the State.

The first factor to bring about the overthrow of the gens and all it stood for was the appearance within the ‘gentile constitution’ (the gens stage) of the pairing family. This occurred during the lower stages of barbarism. The pairing family was an uninstitutionalized de facto long-term association of a man and a woman. At first the pairing family co-existed fairly easily with the gens, because it was not a formal organized institution as was the gens, and so the implications of the gens for such things as property and politics remained unchallenged. The pairing family differed from the monogamy of later states in that it was not a legally binding institution. It could be, and often was, ended at will by either party. The pairing family had been brought about, so Engels and Morgan believed, by women wishing for a little permanence in their domestic arrangements. Because of this, if it involved binding, it was more a case of binding the man rather than the woman. In this respect it contrasted with the institution of monogamy. Because it was an impermanent unofficial arrangement, the pairing family held no property and at first presented no

threat to the communally held property of the gens. The pairing family as such was of little organizational importance; it was a temporary, private arrangement. For Engels its significance lies in the fact that it was seen as the basis of what was to be the most dramatic change in the history of mankind. This was the simultaneous introduction of several indissolubly linked institutions; monogamy (which later gave rise to polyandry and polygamy), the nuclear family, private property (the property of the nuclear family), the change in the rule of descent from the female line to the male line, the subordination and humiliation of women, and the State.

This dramatic change was caused both by the presence of the pairing family and by the introduction of herding and agriculture. These new techniques brought about an increase in the things which people needed to control for production, especially land, herds, tools, and even the slaves who became of importance at this stage. These things, therefore, became little by little private property. This new, private property would be, according to Engels and Morgan, in the hands of men, unlike the communal property of the gens, which was controlled by women, since they controlled the gens; this was because Engels believed since men would be responsible for production at this stage it was natural that they would control what was necessary for production.

Men were therefore the first people with private property and soon they wanted to pass on this property to their children. This was impossible, Engels tells us, so long as descent was reckoned in the female line, because he believed inheritance and group membership always went hand in hand. Descent was traced in the female line because when pairing was temporary and informal, it was not possible to reckon it in any other way, as one could only be sure of the identity of the mother of the child, not that of the father. The whole gentile constitution made the transference of private property from father to son impossible. In order to succeed in their desire to pass on their property to their children, men first introduced the rule of monogamy and thus brought about the first great change. Through monogamy, men obtained a sexual monopoly over individual women by which they ensured that the children of these women were their own. Having done that, the men were then able to change the system of descent from matriliny to

patriliny. Sons were able to inherit their father's private property. The result of this dramatic change was the nuclear family.

The second major effect of the introduction of private property occurred, according to Engels, as an indirect result of the change to patriliny, a state which he did not clearly distinguish from patriarchy. This was that women became subordinated economically because the men gained control of the means of production, and so 'while the husband became the bourgeois the wife represents the proletariat' (p. 137). As a further result women were subordinated sexually, because the change to patriliny and monogamy restricted the sexual freedom of the woman, in that it was essential for the man to know he was the father of her children. Monogamy did not, however, simultaneously restrict the sexual freedom of the men, in spite of a pretence otherwise, since men had nothing to lose through philandering.

The origin of the family is therefore the same as the origin of private property, and the origin of the family is the same as the origin of the subordination and exploitation of women. This origin is monogamy. The overthrow of the gentile constitution, which occurred as a result of technological changes, and as a result of the presence of the pairing family, is, according to Engels, the beginning of history as understood by Marx: the exploitation of one class by another and the resulting class struggles.

At this point in the history of the evolution of mankind The Origin rejoins The German *Ideology* and *Formen*, although it continues to consider the themes of the family and the position of women in a way that had not been done before.

Having shown how the advent to monogamy leads to the subjugation of women, Engels follows their increasing humiliation either as prisoners, as in ancient Athens, or as prostitutes. Prostitutes became necessary as a result of monogamy since, as we noted, monogamy both forbids sexual freedom in wives and encourages it in husbands.

Monogamy also leads to marriages being part of property deals among the ruling classes since marriage becomes part of the process of securing heirs to private property, and once marriage is seen as a

matter of passing on property, it rapidly takes on that form exclusively among the propertied classes. Among them, argues Engels, women's wishes and happiness become subjugated to the needs of maintaining the ownership of the means of production within the dominant class. In these ruling classes the destiny of women is thus supremely unhappy. Marriage is one of the elements which leads to the formation and the maintenance of the inequality between classes and it does this at the expense of

women. Institutions such as polygamy are seen by Engels as mere variants on the institution of monogamy. They are simply cases of men accumulating several women who themselves are in the same situation as monogamous wives. (It is interesting that in arguing that polygamy grows out of monogamy Engels was reversing the evolutionary sequence as most anthropologists of his time saw it.)

Finally Engels turns to the future of marriage and this is seen in terms of its past evolution. The depraved state of women in monogamy, associated as it is with private property and capitalism, will, according to him, be replaced when capitalism is overthrown. Then a new kind of family will arise, one which is not based on the exploitation of one sex by another. This exploitation will disappear since, as we have seen, its basis is private property which itself will be abolished. Monogamy as a legal tie, tying women, will die, and both sexes will be equally free to establish long-lasting bonds and, if these prove unsuitable, to break them.

In this way Engels shows, through this complex history of human marriage, the historical basis of the present state of affairs. He shows how the treatment of sex is linked to wider political and economic considerations and therefore how changes in the political economic system will change even that apparently most private of institutions, marriage. The Origin shows that the position of women and the family, as it existed in Engels's time, is not an unchallengeable datum, based on eternal principles, but the temporary product of a period, a product which will and must be overthrown. The second half of the book shows that this is also so for the State, a concept which for many, especially Hegel, was no less holy and fundamental than the family. 'The state', says Engels, '. . . has not existed from all eternity. There have

been societies which have managed without a notion of the state and state power.' (P. 232.)

Engels's discussion of the State in The Origin divides into three parts. The first part consists of an evolutionary analysis describing under what conditions the State arises. This is mainly to be found in the last chapter of the book. The second part is an attempt to debunk the then generally accepted view that there was something unique, mysterious, almost supernatural in the rise of the European notions of politics. This Engels does by showing that the Greek and Roman states, the 'sacred' sources of the European ideal, were based on principles which can also be seen in embryo among

much less prestigious peoples, the American Indians. This is dealt with in Chapters 3,4,5, and 6. The third part of Engels's discussion explains why, in spite of the presence of the State in medieval Europe, some islands of communal organization could and did remain. This is explained in terms of the nature of the Germanic invasions which brought about the destruction of the Roman Empire and is dealt with in Chapters 7 and 8.

The outline of the evolutionary theory of the State in The Origin is one we are already familiar with from the earlier writings of Marx and Engels, but it is expanded here with new information from Morgan. The main point of Engels's and Morgan's argument is that, once again, the State has the *same* origin as the family, private property, and class division, or in other words the overthrow of the gens. Engels stresses the contrast between the political nature of the gens and the State. The gens is a group of people who act together on an egalitarian and communal basis. 'All are equal and free —the women included.' (P. 159.) Its leaders are temporary and subject to the will of the people. Individual gens are linked with one another, in that their ancestors are thought of as related, thereby creating an obligation between the members of these gens. These links are moral and involve no subordination. Groups of gens related in this way form phratries and phratries may be linked one to another in a similar fashion to form tribes. Furthermore gens and phratries are linked to other gens and phratries through ties of marriage. This is a result of the rule which forbids marriage within the gens and so forces the creation of marriage

ties between gens. Because of the presence of all these links, there is order in such a system, even though it is a type of 'society which still "has" no state' (p.188) and no classes. This conclusion enables Engels to make again one of the most important points in The German *Ideology.* The two terms 'society' and 'State' are not, as many political philosophers had assumed, synonymous. Order can exist without the State. The political implications of this are obvious; the State is not necessary for peace, whose basis must be found elsewhere.

There is for Engels, however, an intermediary stage between the State and the gens. This was the situation which Morgan described for the Iroquois when several tribes get together, not any more on the basis of kinship or marriage, but on the basis of confederacy. This was exemplified by the league of the Iroquois which Morgan had studied in detail. For both Engels and Morgan

the league typified a general political stage, and Engels argued that it could be found elsewhere in many parts of the world.

By then, however, the stage was set for the rise of the true State. The equality of the gentile constitution was threatened by private property, exploitation, monogamy, and the nuclear family. This process as we have seen, leads to the break up of community and the formation of classes. The State then becomes necessary because in The Origin as in the other works it is revealed as being one of the mechanisms for ensuring the continuing domination of the higher classes. In this way The Origin demonstrates a complete tie-up between politics, economics, kinship, and gender roles, and this view of all the different aspects of society as an essential whole is what gives The Origin its power. Perhaps the most significant fact about Engels's book is that the word 'origin' is in the singular. For him there is one origin to phenomena we tend to think of as distinct: private property, the family, and the State.

The State is the result of the disorder brought about by inequality and private property and it is the means by which this inequality and private property is maintained. Engels re-echoes The German *Ideology* in showing that far from the State being the repository of justice, it is the repository of exploitation, but here he does this by use of genuine

anthropological materials. According to Engels the State only develops with the full elaboration of classes, and it is the tool of the ruling class enforcing its will on those whom it oppresses. This is a crucial proposition which we have already noted and which will be discussed again later in this book. It is by means of this idea that the State is linked with the earlier part of the origin of kinship and marriage. Classes and private property grow out of the family and together these various factors lead to the break-up of the gens. This destruction is, therefore, not only the origin of private property, not only the origin of the family, monogamy, and the oppression of women, it is also the origin of the State.

The second part of this second half of The Origin deals with Greece and Rome and in many ways again follows what Marx and Engels had written previously. What is new however is the suggestion, which at the time of writing must have appeared as the height of impertinence, that the Greek and Roman states originated in much the same kind of confederation as the Iroquois. In this way Engels asserts the generality of the principles discussed, but also he explains the importance of what he believed were

remains of gentile principles in the organization of Greece and Rome. (He does admit however that these remains were - in historical times at least—linked to patrilineal groups; rather odd inheritors of the principles of the matrilineal gens.)

Two other general points also emerge from the discussion of Greece and Rome. The first is that it shows well the distinction Engels makes between general principles - in this case the dissolution of communal organization and the rise of class—and specific cases. Engels does not pretend that the histories of Greece, Rome, and the Iroquois are identical. What he states is that the same general principles govern their development, although conditions were so different that these principles had considerably different effects in the different cases.

The second general point is that the discussion on Greece and Rome shows that Engels thought that the general scheme of social causation developed by Marx for capitalism applied to precapitalist formations, so long as these were past the gens stages. This is the scheme according

to which material conditions give rise to class relations which at first develop in direct response to these material conditions. Then the logic of the social system and the antagonism of classes continues to develop so that ultimately it destroys itself and the material conditions which brought it about. Rome and Greece, for Engels, develop classes (slaves) in response to the development of agricultural techniques and the growth of manufacturing, both of which cause an increase in the division of labour. The division of classes, however, goes on increasing and it finally undermines the society in which it had arisen. Engels says of the Greeks: 'The downfall of Athens was not caused by democracy as the European lickspittle historians assert to flatter their princes, but by slavery, which banned the labour of free citizens.' (P. 181.)

Thus for the period after 'the origin' Engels returns to Marxist orthodoxy: 'Here we shall need Marx's *Capital* as much as Morgan's book.' (P. 217.) This is because the demise of capitalism which Marx prophesies in *Capital* takes the same form as the demise of Greece and Rome, according to Engels. The class system created to operate the new economy in both the case of capitalism and ancient society leads to such opposition, exploitation, and contradiction that the system for which it was created collapses. This downfall opens the way for a new social system in both cases.

The third part of the second half of the book mainly concerns the Germanic tribes which invaded and finally overthrew the Roman empire. Engels here, as elsewhere, is clearly influenced by the romantic nationalist tradition of nineteenth-century historians, and the praise which he lavishes on these groups, as well as the labelling of them as 'German', is probably misplaced. On page 215 he does, however, try to put some distance between himself and the racist overtones of this tradition: 'But what was the mysterious magic by which the Germans breathed new life into a dying Europe? Was it some miraculous power innate in the German race, such as our chauvinist historians romance about? Not a bit of it. The Germans, especially at that time, were a highly gifted Aryan tribe in the full vigour of development. It was not however their specific national qualities which rejuvenated Europe, but simply their barbarism, their gentile constitution.' Engels's argument is clear: the Germans were able to vanquish the Romans because their

society was not so internally corrupted by class. At the same time it shows that Engels did not always believe that ‘higher’ stages always followed upon lower ones.

The main point, however, of the section on the Germanic tribes is a discussion of the nature of feudalism, and this is little different from that found in The German Ideology. Engels, like Marx, was particularly interested in the historical significance of traditional communities which might have retained, in much later historical periods, something of their ‘gentile’ constitution. In that he was much influenced by contemporary historians: Kovalesky and Maurer. This interest ultimately led him to write a separate work on the topic, Die Mark. This side of his work we cannot discuss here since it would best be dealt with in a book concerned with history and Marxism. We have enough to do in evaluating Marx’s and Engels’s use of anthropology and this is the task of the next chapter.

3. The Present-Day Standing of Marx's and Engels' Anthropology

Before continuing with the history of Marx's and Engels's ideas in our field until the present, we must first examine how these ideas stand in the light of modern developments in anthropology. Since their work covered such a vast range of subjects, it is necessary to limit the discussion to topics which have arisen within the traditional limits of anthropology, and to leave to other studies an examination of Marx's and Engels's views of such periods as feudalism or ancient Greece and Rome, since these fall more under the orbit of historical studies. Some other topics, such as the discussion of the Asiatic mode of production and the notion of ideology, will also be left to other parts of the book.

We must first consider one of Marx's and Engels's fundamental notions, the idea that human history goes through certain ordered stages. Marx and Engels and, for that matter, Morgan and their other sources, were in no way peculiar in this belief; they were representatives of a current of opinion that was almost universally accepted by the end of the nineteenth-century. Since then, however, this fundamental premiss has come under attack in a variety of ways and it is true to say that 'evolutionism' is considered unacceptable by most modern Western anthropologists. What this rejection consists in, however, is less than clear. It may consist in a rejection of the specific schemes or lines of evolution propounded by nineteenth-century authors. It may consist in a rejection of the notion that there are identifiable stages, or that talking of stages is a useful way of visualizing evolution. It may involve a rejection of the idea of evolution altogether. Unfortunately many modern anthropologists are very vague as to which of these different objections they are making when they object to 'evolutionism' in general.

The most fundamental objection consists in the view that human history is not governed by any general laws at all, or at least by any universal laws, and that the attempt to construct an all-embracing history of mankind is therefore futile. Among the

writers who have advocated such a view are the great American anthropologist Boas and some of his pupils, and also, for somewhat different reasons, the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard. These authors stress the uniqueness of each and every different culture and the unexpectedness of history. Their position will be considered in Chapters 5 and 6. It is in fact only rarely openly acknowledged by other anthropologists, though the blanket rejection of evolution which is to be found in the work of many seems to imply it. Rather, modern anthropologists tend to attack the specific evolutionary sequences in the work of the earlier writers—often, as we shall see, with good reason —and they also criticize the notion of stages.

To talk of human history as going through stages implies that there is an unavoidable link-up between technological systems, political systems, economic systems, kinship systems, etc. In fact recent findings make this kind of view untenable, as we will see below. In any case, as anthropologists have learned more and more about different societies, they have found ever-greater difficulty in pushing into any one list of stages the variety of forms of human society which modern research has revealed. The kinds of stages which we have found in the work of Marx and Engels seem now to most anthropologists much too moulded to European history, even taking into account the modifications which, as we saw, were gradually incorporated in their work to handle their growing knowledge of non-European societies. This Eurocentrism was inevitable at a time when in Europe only European history was at all well known, and Marx's and Engels's 'general' stages often read like little more than a generalized history of western Europe. Eurocentrism seems however much less excusable in the work of modem historians who, following in Marx's and Engels's footsteps, still seem to consider the examples they used sufficient to generalize about human history (Anderson, 1974). When these 'stages' have been used to identify societies outside Europe the result has often been misleading. For example, Goody and others have argued that the labelling of pre-colonial West African states as 'feudal' has obscured the all-important fact that the control of the ruling class did not operate through the control of land, and that therefore Marx's ideas cannot be used directly for these societies. (Goody, 1971, ch. II.) This is one example among many. Another objection to the notion of 'stages' is due to the same problem. It

consists in pointing out the fact that, as soon as we use the stages as a type of classification, we find we have more

doubtful borderline cases than typical ones, because of the great variation of social systems in history in different parts of the world.

Most modern Western anthropologists, therefore, reject both the nineteenth-century evolutionary sequences and the notion of stages, but this of course is not a rejection of evolution itself. None the less many writers seem to imply that it is, and as a result their position is unclear. They do not for the most part take a position like that of Boas and Evans-Pritchard which rejects the very notion that there are general laws governing human history; and if they do not, it would seem that they too are driving, however cautiously, towards an understanding of human history in general, in other words toward a theory of human evolution. Because this is so, I do not believe that their position is as different from that of nineteenth-century anthropologists and Marx and Engels as they would like us to believe, if we were to take their rejection of 'evolutionism' at its face value. It must be said however, that they are infinitely more cautious than their predecessors, and on the whole with good reason. We shall return to this largely negative and vague theoretical attitude on the part of modern Western anthropologists, but it is accompanied by much more definite and often more valuable criticism of earlier schemes, such as those used by Marx and Engels. It is with these criticisms that we shall deal now.

In The Origin, and already as far back as The German *Ideology,* Marx and Engels followed their contemporaries in believing that the history of mankind usually went through the same sequence of technological improvement. The sequence, by and large, went like this: first gathering of plants and small animals, second fishing, third hunting, fourth pottery, fifth pastoralism, sixth agriculture, seventh metalworking. There are now several elements of this sequence which are clearly unacceptable.

First, gathering, hunting, and fishing do not represent clearly different technological stages but always occur together so long as the environment permits this combination. The archaeological records of man show these three activities normally co-existing (Lee and DeVore,

1964). On the other hand all modern anthropologists and archaeologists would agree with the view that for a very long period of history mankind has existed solely by hunting, fishing, and gathering, and that such a technological stage always precedes domestication of plants and animals.

The next stage in the sequence is also problematic. Marx and

Engels, as well as many of their contemporaries, believed that pastoralism predated agriculture. They apparently originally got the idea from a book by W. Cooke Taylor, The *Natural History of* Society in the *Barbarous and* Civilized *State, 1840,* which Marx read in 1851 (Krader, 1972:90). This is clearly wrong: if anything, the evidence is all the other way (Ucko and Dimbleby, 1969); in most cases agriculture preceded herding. How far Marx and Engels were wedded to the idea is not clear and Engels did note that this sequence did not apply to the New World. Their idea of the origin of private property was, however, intimately linked with the importance of the ownership of herds. In The Origin the development of herding was a major turning point. By contrast, most modern prehistorians would stress, as the major turning point, the dramatic importance of the domestication of plants *and* animals, the 'neolithic revolution'. This is still seen as one of the most important events in the history of mankind.

Modern prehistorians do not any more attach such importance to the introduction of pottery, which cannot be clearly correlated with such things as agriculture. The importance which Engels attributed to this came entirely from his anthropological sources and really reflects an old-fashioned type of archaeology obsessed with material remains rather than with the general way of life. This attitude, on the part of their sources, is basically foreign to Marx's and Engels's overall work, and one feels they would have been more at home with the work of more modern prehistorians. Indeed they seem to have foreshadowed later work by attaching such primary importance to domestication.

Another more important criticism of Marx's and Engels's technological sequences comes from the fact that they give the impression that progression through these technological stages was an inevitable progression from lower to higher. Although overall this view is still

widely held, it is possible to point to several cases of reversal when, for example, agriculturalists reverted to hunting and gathering. It can be argued, however, that Engels and Marx did not rule out such a possibility themselves, as is suggested by the discussion of the success of the Germanic tribes in overthrowing Rome, a case when people with a lower technology replaced a society based on a higher stage.

There is however an important general point at issue here. It is possible to read some of the writings of Marx and Engels as suggesting a mechanical succession of stages, following one after

the other, or it is possible to see in their work, concentrating on other passages, a less determinist view of progress. I believe that both views of their writing are justified in that they seem to have oscillated between these two poles and such oscillations are noted in several places in this book. None the less, irrespective of what their position might be, modern anthropology would reject the view that the progress of technology is totally irreversible, although the sequence of technological progress Marx and Engels took over from their anthropological sources is still, by and large, acceptable. The problem with their evolutionary sequence does not lie so much with what they say about technology as what they saw this technology as implying.

Before we examine these problems one important question of method must be noted. Marx and Engels, like all their contemporaries, including anthropologists and archaeologists and Morgan in particular, felt that information gained about contemporary peoples whose life depended on a simple technology was valid for understanding the social institutions of prehistoric populations vyho had relied on a similar technology. For example, if the Bushmen of the Kalahari, who live by hunting and gathering, accord a high status to women this, it was assumed, must also have been true of the hunters and gatherers of prehistoric times. This way of reasoning is, however, problematic for a number of reasons. The first is that the history of the Kalahari Bushmen is just as long as those of technologically more advanced people of today, and so they are not representative of an ‘earlier period’ in the history of mankind. Their society may have, and most probably has, changed radically and

often since the time when hunters and gatherers roamed Europe. The second difficulty is that, although the Kalahari Bushmen may have a similar technology to European prehistoric hunters and gatherers, their economic situation is very different. The Bushmen have been pushed back from much richer regions into the most inhospitable areas of Africa by other more technologically advanced peoples with whose enmity they still have continually to reckon. By contrast the prehistoric men of Europe were settled in the most fertile and advantageous areas of the country and did not have to fear more technologically advanced enemies. Their lives were therefore presumably very much easier and different from that of Bushmen. Because of this fundamental difference it is difficult to know whether we can rely on information about

contemporaries to tell us about prehistoric peoples in the way that is often done still today and was done universally in Marx's and Engels's time.

The significance of the objections we have just noted is much more important than might at first appear. These objections imply that technology cannot be a guide to other aspects of society, or in other words that there is no inevitable association between technology and other aspects of society. This qualification applies as much to the work of writers such as Morgan as to his critics. They all believed that several corresponding processes could be identified, especially in the field of kinship, which went automatically in parallel with technological evolution.

We are now ready to examine in detail the assumptions in Marx's and Engels's work concerning the evolution of social aspects of human society. First we shall look at the theories in their work concerning the evolution of kinship and marriage. This means that we should pay special attention to The Origin, since this is where the matter is discussed extensively.

The evolution of kinship, marriage, and the status of women is a particularly revealing theme of this work. That is because it is an area where Marx and Engels, misled by Morgan, went most wrong, yet where at the same time they made the best use of anthropology. The explanation behind that paradox is once again the problem of the two

uses of anthropology in their work. The rhetorical use they made of anthropologists' ideas as a source for a criticism of the society of their time, especially as a criticism of the way institutions such as the family, marriage, and the status of women were seen as unchangeable and eternally fixed, is one which seems totally justified to present-day anthropologists. However as an account of the actual historical evolution of kinship, their use of anthropology was disastrous, thanks largely to Morgan. We shall first have a look at this 'historical' side of things before turning to the positive 'rhetorical' side of their work.

First we must once again concern ourselves with method and examine two assumptions which Engels took over from Morgan concerning the significance of kinship terms. The first such assumption is the belief that the pattern of kinship terms reveals the marriage system. As we have seen, this was a key point for Morgan because all his evidence about kinship came from kinship terms. In the tendency of certain systems of kinship terms to group large numbers of people under words which he translated

as 'father' or 'mother' lay his proof for the existence of the communal marriages on which his theory of the evolution of the family, in general, and of the gens, in particular, rested. This idea of Morgan's is far from ridiculous. It ultimately relies on the notion that we order our world through the categorical distinctions of our language. According to such a theory, if we, in English, call both our mother's brother and our father's brother by the same term—'uncle' —it is because these two relatives are, to us, the same 'kind' of relative, and that probably the fact that we use the one word causes us to see them in that way. In another language where mother's brothers and father's brothers are referred to by different words we would see them as different kinds of relatives. This general view is still often held by anthropologists and has been repeatedly advocated by, among others, the British anthropologist E. R. Leach, for example, in his article 'Concerning Trobriand Clans and the Kinship Category Tapu' {Leach, 1958). The opposite view, that of Morgan's contemporary, McLennan—a view derided by Morgan, Marx, and Engels — sees kinship terms as having no social significance at all. It is a view which, by contrast with that of Morgan and Engels, is, as far as I know, totally abandoned. The general consensus now would be that, even if systems of kinship terms

are closely linked to social systems, the link is not as simple as Morgan made out. The fact that several types of relatives can be called by the same term does not mean that they cannot be distinguished. The fact that we call both our mother's brother and father's brother by the same term does not mean that we are unaware of the fact that we are related to them in different ways or that we cannot express this difference by using such phrases as 'my uncle on my mother's side'. This is just the same for systems like the Polynesian one, discussed by Engels, where large numbers of people can be referred to by the same term as one's father. In such a system one can say 'my own' or 'my true father' and this is often done. In this way people using such a terminology may distinguish the role of father from that of father's brother. There is therefore no reason to believe that in such a system these two relatives are equally my mother's husband or that they both have similar sexual rights over my mother. The pattern revealed by kinship terms cannot therefore be used as evidence of marriage systems in the way that Morgan believed. This crucial element in Morgan's evidence is an illusion and there is not the slightest shred of evidence that those

societies where large numbers of people can be referred to by the terms for parent are societies where marriage is either more or less individualistic. There is no correlation at all between the number of types of relatives that are called by the same word and the number of legitimate sexual partners in marriage.

Equally problematic is Morgan's other assumption: that systems of kinship terms change less easily than marriage systems, and that kinship terms can serve as an indication of what the marriage system was like in the past. In some ways this principle is contradictory to the assumption, discussed above, that there is a match between terminology and marriage systems.

The idea that there is something of a lag between terminology and social system is interesting and there does indeed sometimes seem to be this type of gap. For example, a group of people I studied in Madagascar changed their marriage system in response to changing economic circumstances but did not adjust their kinship terminology (Bloch, 1974). This time lag, however, does not always occur, as I

show in the same study, and we are not in a situation to make the kind of general assumption made by Morgan and Engels. We can say that the relationship between marriage system and terminology is itself highly variable and so too is the way they interact on each other. Because of this, the system of kinship terms is not valid evidence of what the marriage system was in the past, and Morgan's and Engels's assumptions, which rely on such an inference, cannot be accepted.

As a result much of the evidence for the evolution of kinship in *The* Origin is irrelevant. So, leaving aside for a moment the difficult question of whether to accept the kind of association between kinship system and technological level postulated by Morgan, Marx, and Engels, it is not surprising that modern anthropology reveals no such association between technology and kinship terms. For example, the Eskimos, who as hunters and fishermen are right at the bottom of Marx's and Engels's technological scale, have a kinship terminology which does not classify relatives any more than the English system does — a sign for Morgan of the presence of monogamy - while the Malays, who have possessed for a very long time highly advanced agricultural techniques, use a kinship terminology which Morgan and Engels associated with the earliest stages of evolution.

Engels does introduce into The Origin some types of evidence for early family forms other than terminology. For example, in the

fourth edition of The *Origin* he introduced evidence of group marriages occurring among the Australian Aborigines. Unfortunately this type of evidence is also misleading, for two reasons. First, Engels believed that his source, the writers Fison and Howitt, provided independent evidence of group marriage, while in fact they too were enthusiastic supporters of Morgan's theories. Secondly, even though group weddings do occur, for example among people like the Samburu of East Africa, where traditionally all the young men of the same age group married on **the same** day **a** group of girls, this does not mean that the marriages are any less individual affairs for having been celebrated all at the same time. The young man who has been married at the same time as his peers does not share his wife with them nor do the wives share the husbands. This is the type

of evidence which misled Engels into believing that communal marriage actually survived [Spencer, 1965).

Having dealt with the methodological preliminaries, we can now turn to the evolutionary scheme for kinship systems presented in The Origin.

The first stage in the scheme was that of total primitive promiscuity. It is one for which, as we have seen, neither Morgan nor Engels presented any evidence. This is still the situation today. We now know much more about surviving hunters and gatherers than was known in Morgan's day and, although sexual unions among them may in some cases be very unstable, in others they are not. Furthermore, the high instability of marriage which does occur is not in any way unique to them.

A further stage in the scheme is much more interesting; this is the stage of the communal gens. The main aspect of the gens which interested Engels and Marx was its communal character, the way it was internally undifferentiated and the way it held property as well as people and children in common. In stressing this aspect, Marx and Engels were basing themselves in great part on the excellent description that Morgan had supplied for the matrilineal descent groups of the Iroquois, and, in his stress on the community aspect of descent groups, Morgan has been in many ways supported by later work. Anthropologists such as Fortes, the foremost authority on the subject, (Fortes, 1953; 1963) have stressed the extraordinary unity of some descent groups and their communal control of property, as the key element of social organization of the peoples among which they occur. 'When we

turn to Morgan's discussion of this aspect of the gens we must admit that it brilliantly anticipates modem accounts,' Fortes states. Morgan, Marx, and Engels were therefore right in stressing the corporate, non-individualistic aspect of gens. This was the evidence which Marx and Engels required in order to show that society has not always been based on private property held by isolated nuclear families. This was their central point and they found evidence to support it which has stood the test of time. Unfortunately both Marx and Engels, in their enthusiasm for this confirmation of their theory, also took over from Morgan's work on the gens several totally unsupportable assumptions which are in fact quite unnecessary for what they were trying to argue.

The first point that one would want to make in criticism of the gens theory is that, even if descent groups such as the Iroquois gens appear as undifferentiated communities from the point of view of an outsider, this is not so from the point of view of the member of a gens. Hie land of a descent group is said to belong to the group as a whole and an outsider to the group does not have a right to cultivation inside the group territory when a member of the gens does so already. This, however, does not mean that there are no further levels of distinction inside the group or that an individual member or a particular family within the gens may not have privileged access to a part of the gens territory. There is a lot of evidence that such internal restrictions occur in all the accounts of descent groups amassed by anthropologists. Admittedly if the component family abandons its claim to the land this will revert to the commonality but that does not mean that there are no such claims in normal circumstances. In other words, a declaration of common ownership of the land of the gens does not imply free and equal access to all within the gens.

Marx, in particular, had already noted this fact in several places, but he explained the phenomenon of internal division as a transitional one; as evidence of a stage in which private property and individual families were coming in and undermining the communal descent group. A problem with this point of view is that there is in fact no evidence of descent groups having ever existed without these two levels and it seems difficult to treat all documented cases as transitions from a stage for which there is no evidence. In any case, the contradiction which Marx stresses very largely disappears when we realize that it is a matter of the context in which claim to land is expressed. From the point of

view of the outsider the descent group appears as undifferentiated and this will be expressed by statements of the commonality of the resources of claim while, from the point of view of the insider dealing with other insiders the descent group appears highly differentiated.

There is however an implied point in the discussion of the gens which, I believe, is justified in all societies principally organized by descent group (though not necessarily all societies where descent groups merely occur as one among many other social institutions), hi such

societies one does not find internal differentiation based on differential wealth, and if such differentiation appears to develop, it is resisted. This means that in a very general way there is a contradiction between class organization and descent groups, and that this contradiction is actually perceived, though not in theoretical terms, by the members of societies based on descent groups.

The exaggeration or over-simplification of the notion of commonality within the gens as regards ownership of property is also apparent in the discussion of kinship and this led equally to a fundamental misunderstanding. In part Morgan believed that, in systems based on descent groups, spouses were held in common because, in such a society, people often talk of wives or husbands as 'having been married to such and such a gens'. There are indeed certain aspects of the marriage system of such societies which support this point of view. For example, a woman married to a man of a particular descent group may well be passed on to another man of her husband's descent group at his death. This, however, does not mean that she is the wife of all the men of the descent group at the same time. Again one must distinguish the point of view of the outsider and die insider. From the outside people may say she has married into such and such a descent group but this does not mean that she is also not at the same time the wife of a particular man. The communal and the familial are not necessarily in opposition—they are matters of levels, and although at certain times Marx seems to see this, at others he does not and Engels never does. This is because of their legitimate keenness to stress the presence of a communal principle in the history of mankind. None the less the fact remains that the presence of descent groups tells us nothing directly about domestic organization.

There is, however, yet another way in which modem anthropolo-

gists could agree with Marx, Engels, and Morgan concerning the 'group' aspect of marriage. All would stress that our view of marriage as a private alliance concerning almost exclusively two people is totally inapropriate for most non-capitalist societies, especially those based on descent groups. In these societies marriages involve alliances between groups, often of a political character, and as such they are initiated and organized by the leaders of the groups concerned rather than by the

future couple. Similarly, in these societies a large number of people on both the bride's and the groom's side are involved in an obligatory exchange of property of major significance. In this sense all anthropologists would agree that such marriages are primarily group concerns.

Marx in the notebooks is opposed to McLennan, Maine, Phear, and others who disagreed with Morgan over the commonality of the gens, principally because they saw society growing out of the individual monogamous family with its private property. As a result, because they saw descent groups as enlarged families, something which Marx and Engels had themselves done in The German *Ideology,* but which they later emphatically rejected, Marx saw writers such as Maine arguing that monogamy, the subjugation of women, the nuclear family, and private property were ineluctable basic principles in the nature of man. Marx saw this point of view as legitimizing the institutions on which nineteenth-century capitalist society was built. By contrast, Marx saw in Morgan's emphasis on the primacy of the matrilineal gens a challenge to these principles. In this matter of the nature of the gens (descent group) further research has actually proved both sides of the controversy right. As we saw, most modern anthropologists would, like Morgan, stress the corporate character of descent groups and would agree that these groups cannot be understood as large families (Fortes, 1953), but they would also stress that some kind of individual domestic unit seems to normally exist in societies with descent groups.

In certain other ways Morgan misled Marx and Engels more irredeemably. Morgan believed that the only true descent groups were matrilineal, and that matrilineal descent groups—gens-were fundamentally different in organization from systems where descent was reckoned in the male line. In patrilineal descent groups, he argued, the individual family and

private property were prominent and the communal principle already moribund. In fact, there seems no difference between patrilineal and matrilineal groups in this respect. What matters, as Morgan, Marx, and Engels rightly stress, is the corporate organization of descent groups, but these descent groups are just as corporate whether descent is

reckoned patrilineally or matrilineally. The reason Morgan gave to explain why corporate descent groups were organized matrilineally was that since there were no individual unions within such groups one could never be sure of the identity of one's father. This state of gens promiscuity is, however, imaginary and so the reasoning is irrelevant.

Similarly, there is no reason to believe that matriliny preceded patriliny. This idea was very widespread in the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons. Morgan found confirmation of it in the fact that the people he had studied in most detail-the Iroquois-happened to be matrilineal. There is no evidence, however, for thinking that, in general, people who reckon descent in the male line reckoned it in the female line before. This hypothesis was for a long time a subject of much contention in anthropology and is not even now entirely laid to rest, but the meagre historical record we possess cannot possibly support such an assertion.

The pre-existence of matriliny was important for Engels because he wrongly believed that matriliny, as opposed to patriliny, was associated with communal corporate descent groups. It was also important for him because he believed that matriliny, the reckoning of group membership in terms of who one's mother was, was associated with a high status for women. This whole question is of importance not only because it was so central to Engels's book but also because The Origin has rightly been considered a major contribution to the feminist tradition.

Two aspects of Morgan's discussion of this question, a discussion that was almost as radical as that of Engels, must be distinguished, first the proposition that people with simple technology accord a high status to women, and second, that matriliny implies a high status for women.

The first assumption originates in the fact that because Morgan had made a special study of the Iroquois, where the status of women is comparatively high, he assumed uncritically that this high status would be found among other people at a similar level of technological advancement. This is just not so. For example, had

Morgan worked among the peoples of New Guinea, whose technological level he would have considered similar, he would have

reached a totally different conclusion.

Secondly, Morgan gives the impression that there was a direct link between reckoning descent in the female line and high status for women. This association has become further emphasized by writers who have muddled the words ‘matriliny’ — descent through the female line—and ‘matriarchy’ - rule by women. In fact there is no direct link between the status of women and the reckoning of descent in one line or another. Even if one belongs to a group because of who one’s mother was and not because of who one’s father was, this in no way implies that women have particularly high (or low) status in that group. It is not difficult to give many examples of societies where membership of descent groups is gained through women and where the status of women is comparatively low. Again this would, by and large, be true of most of the matrilineal societies of New Guinea where, by most reckoning, the status of women would be considered lower than in many of the patrilineal societies of West Africa. Descent and the status of women may not be entirely independent but they do not co-vary in the simple way suggested by Morgan.

We must now turn to another general assumption made in The *Origin,* the assumption that there is a correlation between technology and kinship system. One of the key assumptions of Morgan and Engels was that the shift from matriliny to patriliny was in some ways linked with the introduction of herding and, subsequently, agriculture. If they had been right, matrilineal society would tend to have a lower level of technological development while patrilineal societies would have a higher level. In fact modern anthropological research shows that there is no such correlation. The kind of situation which we find in most of West Africa, where side by side there are patrilineal peoples and matrilineal with identical technological achievements, occurs again and again in many other parts of the world. In any case, many of the peoples with the simplest technology, such as the hunters and gatherers of Africa and Asia, are neither patrilineal nor matrilineal, and do not form descent groups of any type.

There is also no obvious correlation between level of technology and type of marriage. Monogamy, to take a case particularly important to

Engels, is equally found among hunters and gatherers such as the Eskimos, primitive cultivators such as

the Dayaks of Borneo, or among the industrialized North Americans.

Finally, since there is no simple correlation between high status for women and matriliny and since there is no simple connection between matriliny and type of technology, it follows that there is no simple connection between primitive technology and high status for women. Among living hunters and gatherers, women may have a comparatively high status as amongst the Mbuti of Africa, or a comparatively low status as among most Australian Aborigines.

The issue is far more complicated and it is only fair to note that we have not reached a stage of knowledge when we can easily say what explains the status of women among the different peoples of the world. The status of women has several aspects which themselves do not go simply together. By and large the evidence which Engels and his contemporaries saw as significant of the high status of women in primitive societies is often wrong or does not signify what it was believed to mean.

As Engels noted, women contribute differentially to the processes of production in different types of society but the contribution of women in the production of the most important goods of the society does not necessarily give them a high status as he thought. Among the pastoralists of East Africa women produce most of the foodstuffs through agriculture, but only cattle, cared for by men, are defined as the really important and noble product, and in fact women's dominant productive contribution is given as an excuse for their social devaluation as low creatures unconcerned with the aesthetic and political value of pastoralism. Again in the New Guinea Highlands, women are the main agents in producing both agricultural products and the most valuable possession — pigs — but then, in the view of these people, what really matters is not production, but large-scale, ceremonial exchanges and the significance of women's role in production is once more ideologically denied.

Another feature which Engels, following Bachofen, believed was indicative of the high status of women in societies with simple technology was the fact that some such people worship female gods. This, however, is no indication that they have a particularly high opinion of the spiritual contribution of women. In any case the worship of female goddesses is neither characteristic nor common among hunters and gatherers.

There is also a certain problem in taking women's freedom to dispose of their own sexuality as an indicator of their influence and power in general, as is tacitly suggested by both Morgan and Engels. Although this freedom offers a better indicator than such things as matriliny or the worship of female goddesses, it also is not a clear indicator of their political and economic power, in spite of Engels's belief to the contrary. For example, the women among some of the peoples of the west of Madagascar have great freedom in choosing their sexual partners, yet they are totally insignificant in the administering of political and economic matters.

Overall most anthropologists would probably see indirect connection between all the factors which Engels considered, but these interrelations must remain much more problematic and ambiguous than they might seem at first, and the general conclusions which Engels sought in the work of Morgan are not possible.

The specific history of the evolution of kinship, marriage, and the status of women outlined after Morgan is thus almost altogether untenable. The fault clearly lies with Morgan, but Marx and especially Engels seem on the whole to have been surprisingly uncritical of their source. The reason lies once again in the central fact that the main concern of The Origin was political, not historical. We must never forget that the history of kinship presented there is primarily a criticism of capitalist society and that Marx and Engels were not attempting to set themselves up as anthropologists. As such, as a rhetorical critique of capitalist society, their account serves admirably and this use of anthropology in The Origin echoes many recent anthropologists.

First let us consider the issue of marriage and the family. Engels argued, and this is a fundamental aspect of his work that has become

obscured in the discussion over whether there ever were such things as primitive promiscuity or group marriage, against those who asserted that monogamous marriage and the type of family that was associated with it was a universally valid ideal of man, irrespective of social or cultural context. The family and marriage, in the particular form that it took in Victorian times, was, for the great majority of Engels's contemporaries a sacred, eternal, and unchallengeable institution. By contrast Engels's position was that the family, as it was known in his time,

had not always existed in that form, that marriage as it was known at that time had also not always existed. Marriage and the family were therefore not unquestionable institutions, independent of history and society, they were linked to the economic system, to the political system, to the class system. This central "rhetorical" point is one that would be wholeheartedly endorsed by most modern anthropologists.

Anthropologists have been at pains to stress the variety of accepted institutional arrangements which regulate the relations between the sexes in different societies. How far unions are binding, how far they are exclusive, how long they last, whether they bind men and women equally, whether sexual unions are public or merely private matters, whether the recognition of unions is inevitably linked with the legitimation of children — all these questions and many more are so variable that many anthropologists would argue that it is not possible to give a valid universal definition of marriage (Leach, 1961). Furthermore, all anthropologists would agree with Engels that the type of marriage and the type of family are linked directly to a whole range of other political and economic institutions, which explain and correlate the variation. For modern anthropologists, quite as much as for Marx and Engels, forms of family and marriage are integral parts of the social system and co-vary with the overall system. This therefore means that when the social system changes so will the nature of marriage and the family. An implication, of course, is not only that marriage and the family have taken a great variety of forms, but that when political and economic conditions change in the future they will continue to change. This Engels emphatically asserted in The Origin when he argued that communism would mean the end of the family as

we know it and the liberation of women. It was, qt the time, a most dramatically revolutionary and shocking argument.

Even though the specific predictions of Engels might not be endorsed by modern anthropologists they would nearly all subscribe to the general thesis that as political and economic conditions change, so will marriage and the family change, and this conclusion is apparently still seen as shocking. When in 1967 E. R. Leach made exactly the same point on the BBC, there was a national uproar with bishops and pundits of all kinds fulminating in the newspapers against the impiety of the idea, in much the same way that they had done against Engels almost a hundred

years before. This is the central point of the chapter on the family in The Origin. Engels is saying that the family and marriage have not always been as they are now. These two institutions have a history, and they are therefore specific to a particular time and type of society and, as time passes and society goes on changing, as it always has, these institutions will change. Furthermore, Engels argues, marriage and the family—these ideas which Victorians thought of as peculiarly linked with private life and as having nothing to do with political and economic life—are in reality intimately associated with it. The type of family and marriage which they operated was not given in the nature of man or in other supernatural and suprahistorical sources, but in the economic and political circumstances of their time, in this case by capitalism. The long history of marriage and the family we are given in The Origin is first and foremost to show that the family and marriage do have a history. This was the point which was most politically explosive, and this was the point which has been the cause of the greatest revilement of the book to this day. Interestingly enough, it is also a point with which all serious anthropologists and historians would now agree, although they would perhaps hesitate to spell out, as Engels and Leach have done, its implication.

Engels's general argument concerning marriage and the family applies to his discussion of the status of women, and again his position seems very much in advance of his time. Apart from the specific history of the status of women that Engels was proposing, he was again stressing that the status of women is not an independent fact, perhaps explained

by transcendental ideas concerning the nature of men and women, but rather that men's and women's ideas about women were all aspects of a much wider system which included the whole political economy and its internal logic. This Engels demonstrated brilliantly in his analysis of the position of women in capitalist society. The point that the position of women is not an independent factor, a simple enough point in itself, but one often explicitly refused and, more commonly, implicitly ignored, is again one which most anthropologists would now entirely support, even though they rarely acknowledge Engels's work. The status of women is part of an organic totality and is linked, as Engels argued it was linked, with tiie nature of labour, the nature of property, even the nature of descent. However it is linked to these things because they and it

are part of a complex whole, and this rules out the simple correlations between two elements which Engels sought to establish in his 'historical' discussion.

The second point concerning the position of women which anthropologists would almost universally endorse follows from the first. Because the status of women is inextricably linked to a complex politico-economic system, it, and the ideas connected with it, change in response to changes in the system as a whole. The position of women that Engels found when he was writing was therefore seen by him as the product of a moment in history. The position of women has changed radically and would therefore continue to change. This revolutionary conclusion, which is perhaps the most important for the general reader of The Origin, is one easily supported by modern anthropologists although they might disagree with him about what exactly will happen when the change comes or even whether this kind of change can be predicted.

In the previous section we have examined Marx's and Engels's views about the evolution of the family. This section deals with an examination of their views of early political evolution, principally in the light of the theory in The Origin, but also in their other writings. The main element of this discussion again comes from Morgan and concerns the description of what he calls the 'gentile constitution'. This is a political system based on descent groups and the kinship and marriage ties that

link them. In this, Morgan foreshadows in a most amazing way the understanding of what have since been called ‘acephalous lineage systems’. The description and demonstration of the working of such systems has always been considered a major advance in anthropological theory and is ususally traced to the publication in 1940 of African *Political Systems* by M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard with their respective discussions of the Tallensi of West Africa and the Nuer of East Africa. Fortes, however, when later reviewing the work of Morgan, handsomely acknowledges the extent to which he had been foreshadowed by Morgan (Fortes, 1969), first in terms of his analysis of the way these acephalous systems work, and secondly in his understanding of the way that the continuing existence of politically active descent groups poses a threat to the organization and stability of the State. This last point is politically most important for Engels since he uses it to show how the development of the State implies the destruction of the egalitarian

and communally-based gens: a proof of the Marxist view of the State as fundamentally a class institution, a view first developed in The German *Ideology.*

Engels stresses another point also later to be emphasized by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard in *African Political Systems.* The existence of ‘the gentile constitution’ shows that order can exist without the State. This possibility ran counter to much nineteenth-century political theory, which stressed that the State was the only guarantor of personal safety. Yet the fact that many primitive peoples regulate interpersonal relations with a fair degree of predictability and humanity, without the help of a centralized political system, is one that most anthropologists would now endorse: however, unlike Engels, they do this without pointing out the political implications of such an observation. For Engels, by contrast, the possibility revealed by the gentile constitution was a major guarantee that the Marxist vision of the withering away of the State in a future communist society was not a recipe for chaos, as was argued by his opponents.

The correlation which Morgan and Engels make between very simple agriculture and herding and the gentile constitution is a rare example of a proposition of this kind which has held up fairly well in the light of

recent research. With several modifications, such varied anthropologists as D. Forde (1948), M. Fortes (1953), and M. Sahlins (1961) have given support to the view that segmentary systems, the modern anthropological equivalent of Morgan's 'gentile systems', seem to occur in societies with similar technologies and they are by and large of the type postulated in The *Origin.*

There is therefore very much in Engels's discussion of existing political organization which is still acceptable; however, recent anthropological work makes it clear that if something like the notion of the gentile constitution is to be retained, the concept would have to be broadened to include a much greater variety of such systems than was, or could have been, envisaged by the founders of Marxism. First of all, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard pointed out that the descent groups of segmentary society may be either matrilineal or patrilineal, not just matrilineal as Morgan believed. With some modification, this view, expressed in *African Political Systems,* is generally accepted. Recent research would broaden even further the category and also include systems where descent groups are linked one to another by marriage,

rather than by believed common descent. Such systems can be illustrated by the case of the Kachins of Burma, examined in a famous study by Leach (1954). There also exist cases where the constituent groups of gentile constitutions are not really based either on patrilineal or matrilineal descent, but on a mixture of kinship and locality. The various 'Dayak' societies of Borneo are an example.

This greater variety than that envisaged by Morgan or Engels does certainly modify the picture. On the whole, however, their ideas concerning the political organization of descent-group society, what they call the 'gentile constitution', are surprisingly modern and helpful and seem supported by more recent findings.

The next stage in Morgan's and Engels's scheme for the evolution of political systems is characterized by confederations of different tribes. Morgan, whom Engels followed, was once again basing himself on his studies of the Iroquois. Morgan still remains the main authority on the Iroquois, but the real problem for the general theory is that confederations of the Iroquois type are not found in many places.

Making the confederacy a ‘stage’ is therefore highly misleading since this gives the impression that we are dealing with a recurrent phenomenon. It is also unquestionably misleading to assume, as Engels does, that such a stage must have occurred as a precursor to the emergence of the State in Greece or Rome.

The discussion of the gentile constitution and of the confederacy are however intended by Marx and Engels as a preliminary to their theory of the origin of the State, and for this again they made much use of Morgan’s work. The State for Engels and Marx was as we saw, a tool by which the dominant class maintained its position. According to this theory the State therefore arises with the appearance of classes. This is an extremely bold theory, but in the present stage of historical and anthropological knowledge it is not possible to say whether Marx and Engels were clearly wrong, as they were over primitive promiscuity, or by and large right, as they were over the gentile constitution.

One problem is a matter of definition. Some Marxist anthropologists have argued that units which do not contain classes are not true states, and of course, in these cases, by definition there cannot be classless states. If, on the other hand, any centralized system with a single head, controlling a defined territory, is called a state, it is then possible to give examples of ‘states’ where no

obvious dominant class exists. Of course, in such cases, rulers tend to have different life-styles from their subjects, but what is at issue is that they do not have a privileged access to property, especially to the means of production, an essential element of Marx’s and Engels’s definition of a class. Examples of such ‘classless’ states would include some of the central African states of the nineteenth century, such as the Bemba of Zambia. Some anthropologists would counter these examples by arguing that there actually are class-like phenomena in such states (Terray, 1974), by pointing out the difference in access to the means of production between elders and juniors and men and women, but even if this argument is accepted it gives little support to the general theory in that such ‘class’ differences also occur in clearly stateless societies.

Equally damaging to the overall theory of the origin of the State is the fact that there seem to be examples of stateless societies with mush less problematic classes. An example of such a system would be the Tuareg of North Africa where a ruling class controls large numbers of slaves but where no centralized authority existed traditionally.

The present situation concerning the question, under which circumstances do states arise, is that in all honesty most anthropologists would hesitate to generalize. The few examples of state formation which have been studied in detail are all significantly different in important respects. A number of different theories concerning the necessary prerequisites for the State have been proposed by anthropologists. They stress such things as population density, circumscription in a small area, conquest by outsiders or the diffusion of the idea of divine kingship. None is satisfactory but none really corresponds to Morgan's, Engels's and Marx's theory, with the possible exception of that presented by M. Fried, an American anthropologist, who argues that stratification, is at least, a 'necessary pre-condition' of the State (Fried, 1967).

If Marx's and Engels's hypothesis concerning the origin of the State must remain questionable, their theory seems more important for understanding the way existing states actually work. For a long time the dominant view in anthropology was that the State was a beneficial institution. Even Morgan took this view. He is much more positive about the introduction of the State than Engels. What anthropologists stressed was that the State brought

safety for the individual, peace, and the rule of law. This is a major theme in the work of the American anthropologist Lowie and the British anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown. A similar, prostate position is implied in the way several anthropologists have stressed the potential of state organization for bringing about large-scale public works, such as irrigation or communications networks. Though there is little doubt that all these aspects of the State are valuable and important, it has also become clear that they can form the basis of a very one-sided picture. Recent work by several anthropologists has stressed, by contrast, the State's previously over-looked role as an exploitative mechanism, and this work has in most cases been influenced by Marxism (e.g.

Terray, 1977; Bloch 1977). For example, J. Goody has argued that West African states grew up as a result of monopoly control, by a small group of people, of military technology, which he terms the 'means of destruction'. He argues that this control enables a group of conquerors to subdue and dominate those who do not have access to such technology. Such a view is easily reconciled with Marxist theory, as has been pointed out by E. Terray (Terray, 1977a). In a similar vein there has recently been a whole range of studies of pre-industrial states by anthropologists, largely in terms of class analysis. One of the first examples is the study of the Inca state by Metraux (1969).

It is therefore rather more as a tool for the analysis of the nature and functioning of states than as a theory of the emergence of the State that Marx's and Engels's views are still acceptable to present-day anthropologists.

We now turn to two aspects of Marx's and Engels's anthropological theory which are more directly central to their critique of capitalism than those topics discussed so far: the evolution of labour and property. The discussion of these two topics is not limited to The Origin but is a major theme in all of Marx's and Engels's work.

The history of the evolution of labour is, from *The German Ideology* on, linked with a discussion of the increased division of labour, which itself is linked with increasing technological complexity. Increased division of labour, it is stated, leads to a change in the nature of production, from production for use to production for exchange. The division of labour, Marx and Engels argue in *The* German *Ideology,* is the basis of this transformation in the nature of labour and property which ultimately

lays the foundations of capitalism. The division of labour is closely linked with exploitation in all the works considered here, and its development is usually associated with the growth of slavery, which, together with serfdom, is seen as an intermediary step towards the development of the 'free' labour of capitalism.

Many aspects of the evolutionary scheme which Marx and Engels present would now be unacceptable to anthropologists. First of all their

assumption that in simple societies technology explains satisfactorily the division of labour is untenable. Among many groups of hunters and gatherers, we commonly find an elaborate and unequal division of labour, especially between men and women, which the technology in no way causes. In fact, in these cases the division of labour seems to be the product of the exploitation of women by men, rather than its cause. Thus, among South American hunters and gatherers, women are actively excluded from hunting large animals, an occasional but highly valued activity, but, on the other hand, they are expected to supply the basis of daily sustenance through gathering of vegetable products, an activity which men affect to despise, but which is far more time consuming, and infinitely more important for subsistence. There is no reason in the nature of the technology itself why men should not gather fruits, berries, and roots, and consequently no reason why they should spend so much less time in productive activities. The reason for this is that women are forced to carry on the main productive activity by themselves because of their subjection. A final twist is given to this situation: the fact that women do all of this work is often given as an explanation of their inferiority.

Another assumption made by Marx throughout his work is that higher technology increases the total leisure time available. This assumption was universally accepted until recently by prehistorians and anthropologists, but has been refuted in recent studies of hunters and gatherers. This work surprisingly shows that leisure time actually diminishes as productive technology advances; whether this is because of population increases or because of the rise of an exploitative class is not clear. None the less, this unexpected finding requires many modifications to assumptions which are often made concerning the implications of improved technology, and which are included in Marx's and Engels's work.

Equally important for our evaluation of their theory of labour is

the different view of exchange held by modern anthropology and by Marx and Engels. For them increasing material exchange was seen, as it was by other economists of their time, as arising from improved technology and greater specialization. There is in fact no doubt that specialization does lead to greater exchange, but anthropologists have

become aware of the importance of a different type of material exchange, which is in no way related to technology or specialization. This type of exchange is often called by anthropologists gift exchange. Such exchanges take place not because people need to obtain what they do not produce but in order to demonstrate and maintain social links, often of an egalitarian kind. In this way, people such as the Trobrianders of the Pacific, made famous by Malinowski, spend a great deal of their energy producing goods of no practical value, mainly elaborate pieces of jewellery, for no other purpose than to exchange them with neighbours, and thereby maintain peaceful social relations. In many ways societies such as the Trobrianders' are obsessed with exchange, but with a form of exchange of a totally different nature to that envisaged by Marx and most economists. The presence of this impractical exchange means that modern anthropologists see exchange as more fundamental to social relations than Marx and Engels did. The fundamental Marxist contrast between production for use and production for exchange, as well as the assumption that increasing exchange is correlated with technological specialization, needs fundamental reworking. This rethinking is even more necessary for the assumption that the growth of exchange implies greater inequality. Indeed the type of ceremonial gift exchange to which we have referred seems to be based on egalitarian notions of reciprocity and sharing. Furthermore even exchange resulting from economic specialization does not, in itself, seem to be necessarily correlated with inequalities, as Marx and Engels believed. There are many examples of institutionalized exchanges of goods between peoples, who specialize in different things, which seem to have no hierarchical implications. This would be true, for instance, of the trading that took place in pre-colonial times between different tribes of Australian Aborigines, and there are many other examples.

None the less the general point which underlies Marx's concept of production for use, as opposed to production for exchange, seems, in spite of the objections just considered, a fundamental

advance which has yet to be fully appreciated. Marx was pointing out that the capitalist assumption that what motivates man everywhere and

for all time is the search for profit, is totally misleading and is itself a product of capitalism.

In other societies the accumulation of wealth and profit may be much less relevant. People might aim to be remembered as ancestors by the continuation of their descent group, to have freedom from domination by others, or to have power for themselves, not profit. In this Marx has been proved by subsequent anthropology to be quite right, and many anthropologists would argue that the attribution of the profit motive to people who do not have it has been the greatest hindrance to an understanding of pre-capitalist societies. Marx's recognition of the specificity of motives under capitalism should have alerted us to this problem.

Marx's and Engels's views about slavery should also be modified in the light of more recent work. These views were very strongly influenced by the case of Greece and Rome. Like most of their contemporaries, Marx and Engels assumed that there was something inevitable about the co-occurrence of slavery and a particular type of economy or technnology. Recent work makes us much less confident that any such clear correlation is possible. For example, some hunting and gathering peoples, who according to their scheme would not be expected to have slavery, seem to have had large numbers of slaves. This is the case for some of the North American Indians of the West Coast. By contrast, on the other side of the equator, there are societies, such as some of the traditional pre-colonial Southern African states which though they have pastoralism and agriculture, do not seem to have had slavery. We are not yet in a position, therefore, to replace Marx's and Engels's view with a clear alternative specifying under what conditions a society based on slavery is likely to occur, but similarly we cannont accept Marx's and Engels's theory fully. The evidence is too complex and too little work has been done. Perhaps the only facts that seem to be emerging on this topic are the following two: first, slavery is rare among hunters and gatherers, and, secondly, it occurs most often among pastoralists (Goody, 1980). Even these two conclusions need to be treated with great caution.

By contrast, some of Marx's and Engels's views on slavery, views which owed much to the classical historians whom they

used as their sources, still seem to hold up extremely well. Their link-up of slavery with forms of domination within the family is well documented in traditional systems of slavery such as are found in many parts of Africa. There, as Marx had noted, slaves are often classed together with women and children and are often obtained in order to be adopted by people without descendants.

Equally important is the distinction Marx repeatedly draws between the occurrence of small-scale 'domestic' slavery and whole societies based on the exploitation of slaves, such as was the case for Greece and Rome, and the insistence that these two cases should be kept separate. This fruitful distinction is possible because here as elsewhere Marx and Engels are not bound in their analysis simply by legal forms; they look at the social system as a whole. If they had just looked at the laws governing slavery, as had done both their contemporaries and more recent social scientists, they would have been unable to distinguish between slavery as a minor and rare form of exploitation, on the one hand, supplying occasional domestic and sexual luxuries, and slavery as the basis of whole economies, on the other hand, where most of production is carried out by slave labour. This is because it is quite possible that the laws in both cases may be much the same. It is because Marx and Engels look not just at the laws but at the nature of relations of production within a whole system that this fundamental and analytically fruitful difference shows up with such great prominence in their work. This difference between the two types of slavery and the passage from one stage to the other is one which has been stressed again and again in recent work by anthropologists (Goody, 1980; Bloch, 1980).

Finally, the difference in the nature of slavery and wage labour which Marx and Engels discussed in many places has formed the basis of all recent discussion on the subject. Marx argued throughout *Capital* that although slaves might be more at the mercy of the whims and fancies of their owners than wage workers, it was at least in the interest of the owner to ensure the minimum welfare of his slaves, since they were his property. The employer of wage labour, by contrast, did not need to have this concern with the welfare of his workers. This means that where labour is plentiful slavery is unnecessarily 'expensive'. Marx is therefore able to explain the end of slavery as being due to the fact

that wage workers actually were cheaper to use than slaves. This bold hypothesis would still be accepted by many anthropologists and historians, and even those who have tried to refute it are still working within its framework.

The discussion of the evolution of labour given by Marx and Engels is, as we have seen, open to question on several general and specific points. Overall, however, it has stood the test of time surprisingly well when we consider how little information on precapitalist systems they disposed of.

The reason for their success seems to me to be less due to their perceptiveness concerning pre-capitalist conditions then due to the depth of their analysis of the nature of labour under capitalism. A very large part of Marx's work was intended to show how the particular form and representation of labour under capitalism was an extraordinary fantasy. Labour appeared to have a separate existence from the life of the labourer and thus appeared as an alien object. This, Marx pointed out, was as unfounded as a belief in fairies. Yet people acted as though there was such a *thing* and this illusion was essential both for the working of capitalism and for the acceptability of the exploitation on which capitalism was based. Marx in his early writing was much interested in how the illusion of religion comes about, but in his later writing he seems to have lost interest in religion. The reason is that he began to see the economic concepts on which the society of his time was based, such concepts as value, price, property, and above all, labour, as the nineteenth-century equivalent of religion. Concepts like labour organized life in much the same way as the notion of God had done in the Middle Ages, and it had as little material reference.

Capital is a work almost entirely dedicated to understanding the fantastic nature of such concepts of labour, and to understanding what conditions this type of concept comes about. For the purposes of this second task, Marx uses information on how the concepts are visualized in other systems, hence his use of anthropology and history. He also tries to reconstruct the history of representations in a completely different way. He tries to *imagine* the process by demystifying himself, in other words, by ridding himself of the fantastic in the notion of labour,

and by trying to see what it *would* be like without the strange construction of the system of his time. In the case of labour, Marx was extraordinarily successful.

He imagined labour as it would be, had it not been formulated by capitalism, and saw that it would then be merely an *aspect* of

the total business of living, unseparated from such activities as recreation, consumption, family life: that it would be just part of existence. This in fact seems to be very much the situation which anthropologists have found in pre-capitalist systems, and this was the case with the Malagasy people I studied. In such societies labour is so little thought of as a special separate type of activity that there is no word which in any way corresponds to what we with our language, moulded by the history of capitalism, mean by labour. The life of a subsistence farmer simply does not accord with our notion of labour. For example, we cannot answer such questions as at what time does a rural Malagasy begin work and at what time does he or she end it? There is no break between getting up, washing, husking rice for breakfast, eating the breakfast, making basket work, stopping to chat, going out to cultivate the kitchen garden, mending household objects and tools, going to the field, fishing for crayfish in a nearby stream, swimming there, herding the cattle, playing a musical instrument, etc. All these are part of living, all these activities are totally intertwined, and there is no possibility of separating them into work and leisure. This point has been shown again and again; it is clear from the excellent descriptions of production activities which we have of peoples such as the Tikopia of Polynesia described by Firth (1939) or of the Bemba of Africa by Audrey Richards (1939). These societies and many others support completely Marx's central point: that the conceptualization of productive activity is totally integrated with other social relations in pre-capitalist societies and that the sharp boundary we draw between labour and other activities is absent. In this respect, Marx's anthropology seems amazingly ahead of his time. The full theoretical significance of this idea has only been demonstrated recently by anthropologists who have turned again to Marx in order to find a framework in which to place their observations (Godelier, 1977).

Much of the same sorts of observations as apply to Marx's and Engels's notion concerning labour also apply to their discussions of property. Although throughout Marx's and Engels's work reference to property is so extensive that it is impossible to take them all into account, a general pattern emerges. They believed that there had been a stage when there was no individual property; that is, when no ownership continued beyond the time of use. This stage was followed by the introduction of individual

ownership and this was followed by a few people gradually monopolizing the ownership of the means of production. Of course, Marx and Engels focussed most on this late stage, since they saw it as the cause of the rise of capitalism. However, in order to show the 'historical' nature of this state of affairs they had to stress the existence of previous stages when private property was absent. This idea has often been ridiculed by anthropologists who point out that there is no record or suggestion that there ever was, or ever could be, a stage of total sharing and total freedom of access by everybody at any time in anything. Indeed it is difficult to imagine such a state of affairs, but in fact Marx, especially in Formen makes it quite clear that this is not what he meant at all; it is only under the influence of Morgan in The Origin that Engels might possibly be construed to have implied something so unlikely. Throughout Marx's work he stresses, as he had done for labour, the fantastic nature of the capitalist concept of property, the fantastic notion that there is something of our personality in the things or places we own. Having pointed out the peculiarity and arbirariness of this notion he then assumes that, in *other* systems, the relation of man to his material environment is visualized *differently.* In that he has been thoroughly supported by the anthropological evidence, although the nature of these other systems has proved often much more complex than he had imagined.

The general consensus among modern anthropologists is that we too should get away from the notion of private property as we know it, when we analyse the economic system of pre-literate peoples, but instead talk of a multiplicity of rights of different types. Thus, in such societies, people may have rights of temporary use, rights to exclude foreigners, rights to claim something if they particularly need it. Nevertheless, all these types of rights contrast fundamentally with the ' once-and-for-

all' rights vested in an individual that we think of as private property. This difference is all the more complete in that different rights in the same thing or place may be and usually are held by different people or different groups of people in those societies. Marx was therefore quite right in stressing the historical peculiarity of private property. He also comes very close to describing what anthropologists have actually found is the case as regards property in pre-capitalist systems. Above all he was right in arguing, as he did in Formen that the absence of 'private

property' in no way implies 'the law of the jungle'. In all this work, Marx, and to a lesser extent, Engels, foreshadow later anthropology and even run into the same technical difficulties concerning what term to use for pre-capitalist property systems, thereby showing how close they are to modern scholars. The attempt to understand and to find suitable words for these different types of property is one that is still going on in anthropology and is proving extremely difficult (Goodenough, 1951; Goody, 1962; Gluckman, 1965; Bloch, 1975).

In another fundamental respect, Marx's general view is also well borne out. The complete ownership by individuals of the means of production, especially land, is, as he predicted, totally unknown in the traditional societies that anthropologists have studied. It only occurs as a result of the incorporation of these societies into capitalist systems. The difference to which he was drawing our attention, therefore, remains a fundamental one between the types of society Marx was distinguishing by this means.

We have seen how Marx's and Engels's ideas about precapitalist societies have been either supported or invalidated by subsequent knowledge. As is to be expected, the story is a mixed one. If their ideas about the evolution of kinship seem almost entirely obsolete the same is not true of their ideas about property or the evolution of the State although, in these areas too, many modifications are necessary. In one way, however, it is misleading to evaluate the significance of their work on these subjects by how right or how wrong is the evolutionary sequence they describe. Their purpose was quite clear and was quite different. Neither Marx nor Engels considered himself to be a historian or anthropologist. They used the work of anthropologists and historians

which was available, and on the whole they used this work very judiciously. Inevitably, however, they took over many factual and theoretical shortcomings from the anthropologists on whom they relied and most of the problems we have seen in their work they inherited from their sources.

The reason why they turned to anthropology and history had more to do with their analysis of capitalism than with a concern with pre-capitalist societies for themselves. They were seeking throughout their work to show that the concepts on which the edifice of capitalism was built, the concepts of the State, of property, of the nature of men and women, of marriage, of the

family, of labour, of trade, and of capital itself, were not unshakeable givens based on such ahistorical phenomena as the nature of man, or logic, or god. Rather, they argued, these concepts, which appeared as eternal, were really the product of the history of the system they maintained. The anthropological excursion which they undertook was there to show the arbitrariness, the contextual, relative nature of these concepts. Only when these concepts and their false permanence had been penetrated could an acceptable analysis of politics be possible.

What mattered to Marx and Engels was therefore not so much the specific history which had produced these concepts, but the fact that they had a history at all, that the concepts were dependent on the type of society and economy in which they occurred. This idea was totally foreign and repugnant to the accepted view of their time and this is probably still largely so today. In spite of this the idea that marriage, the family, property, the State etc. are merely temporal, transitory institutions, the product of a particular social system, is an idea which all modern anthropologists would accept even if many would hesitate to broadcast it. Indeed the conclusion that such diverse aspects of society as religion, kinship, politics, and economics form a linked whole has been one of the touchstones of modern anthropology. Marx and Engels were probably the first to demonstrate this so emphatically. It was by demonstrating this wholeness that they were able to show that when one side of this whole changes, so will the other. This central point in Marx's and Engels's work has been on the whole supported by later anthropological work.

No modern anthropologist doubts the uncomfortably revolutionary conclusion that all aspects of society form a whole and that none is independent of the moment of history characterized by this transitory, all-embracing system. They might not, however, follow Marx and Engels in their conclusion that the system on which their own society is based will therefore also be overthrown, but it is difficult to see how such a conclusion can be avoided.

4. The Direct Successors to Marx and Engels

Looking back at the works of Marx and Engels so far examined we can see that these leave a fairly clear picture concerning some topics, and major uncertainties concerning others. First, all of these works follow the perspective outlined in The German *Ideology* and look at human societies as systems organizing production and reproduction rather than as institutional structures. This is the fundamental starting point of all Marxist studies of society.

The anthropological concerns with which Marx's and Engels's work deal in the clearest fashion concern such matters as the evolution of property, the evolution of forms of labour, and the growth of the State. In these three areas there is a clear development in the various works considered in the previous chapters, and these different studies build on each other. Property changes in nature as private property is introduced, and this type of property becomes the foundation of capitalist exploitation. Labour changes from being at a stage where it has not yet become a thing in itself and is merely an aspect of social life, to a stage when although still an aspect of social life it involves exploitation, i.e. slavery and serfdom, to a third stage when labour has become mysteriously represented as a thing and is used for a different kind of exploitation. The State is seen as developing as class differentiation increases, because it is one of the tools by which a dominant class maintains itself. On these three topics the various works are all agreed apart from minor variations. There are, however, other questions to which the different works give apparently different answers.

The first such question arises over the specific status of the evolutionary sequence which is being put forward. Although in all the three books considered there is some evolutionary scheme, when we take them together it is clear that Marx and Engels were very willing to modify the overall picture whenever they obtained new information. This new information was, not surprisingly, usually about non-western European societies, about which they

clearly felt more unsure. For example, when Marx learnt about India, China, and Peru, he introduced his oriental or Asiatic stage. When Marx and Engels learnt more about primitive societies, as a result of reading Morgan and other anthropologists, they revised their views in that area. We therefore get an overall impression of relative flexibility. It is also clear that in some places, Marx at least, seems willing to envisage qualifications which are even more fundamental; for example, that there might be more than one line of evolution. This we have seen him do in Formen. The overall flexibility which is clear when we take the three works together seems to be much less evident when we look at The Origin by itself. There Engels more or less tells us that the scheme presented is not likely to be changed by new discoveries. He also presents us with a fairly strict unilineal theory of evolution, (if we forget about the difference between the New and the Old Worlds).

The other area of doubt concerns a question whether the same laws of historical development apply to the whole history of mankind or whether different, simpler laws apply to primitive societies. This, as we have noted, is closely linked to the question whether something like classes have always existed, because the Marxist theory of history centres around the notion of class. If, as Engels assumes in The Origin, primitive societies contained no inequality, then it would follow, according to Marxist thought, that a different, simpler theory of history would apply for these societies. If, on the other hand, something like classes had always existejd, as assumed in The German *Ideology,* the first edition of The Communist *Manifesto,* and Formen, then the principles developed by Marx in *Capital* could be made to apply to all societies. What this difference meant was that, according to the earlier works, the same complex relation between ideas, institutions, relations of productions, and technology applied to all societies, while, according to The Origin, a different theory applied to primitive societies. In these, according to Engels, ideas and institutions were merely a direct reflection of economy and technology.

In both these key areas of doubt, The Origin stands in contrast to the earlier work. The *Origin* proposes a single fixed line for social evolution and it argues for a radical break between the times before and after the change, a break which implies a different type of historical causation for

the two periods. This position in The Origin was, as we have seen, due to the merging of

the rhetorical and the historical use of anthropology, so that examples antithetical to capitalism became in this work an actual stage of human history. This tendency was strengthened by the work of Morgan, whose view of historical causation—his application to human society of ideas derived from The Origin *of* Species and vulgar materialism—was adopted by Engels for primitive society.

When we turn to the fortunes of Marxist ideas concerning anthropology following the publication of The Origin and up to the period when Soviet anthropology took on its characteristic form in the 1930s, it is essential to bear in mind that of the three main works by Marx and Engels dealing with pre-capitalist systems -The *German Ideology, Forme*n, and The Origin—only the last of these was published. Inevitably, it had most influence on later ideas. Only when we remember this simple fact can we understand what happened next.

We can now turn to the period between 1883 and 1917 and see how The Origin was interpreted, as well as what were the factors which moulded that interpretation.

The first part of this period is dominated by the elderly Engels. It has been a subject of continuous debate how far Engels and Marx differed. So far we have treated the two founders of Marxism as though there was little difference in their views, since an attempt to separate their ideas in such joint works as The German *Ideology,* or even in a book such as *The Origin,* which though by Engels was in part based on Marx's notes, seems doomed to failure. However, if we take works for which Engels was exclusively responsible, such as *Anti-Duhring,* and especially those works he wrote after Marx's death, there is at the very least a difference of emphasis from those works written exclusively by Marx (Colletti: 1974). These differences of emphasis are concerned with topics which are fundamental to Marxist historical theory.

The first such difference concerns the question of how far history is to be seen as a kind of continuation of natural history and therefore as governed by the biological principles of evolution and natural selection.

That history could be seen in this way was a view widely shared in liberal and left-wing circles in Europe during the nineteenth century, and it affected the opinions of a large number of writers; for example, the British sociologist Herbert Spencer, whose ideas on this in part pre-date Darwin's

work. The same could be said of the anthropologists Tylor, Morgan, and Lubbock, all of whom influenced Engels, Marx, and their immediate disciples. Engels's position on this matter is repeated in many places. In *Ludwig Feuerbach* and the End *of Classical German Philosophy,* published in 1885, we have the following passage: '. . . what is true of nature, which is hereby recognised also as an historical process of development (as a result of Darwin's discovery of evolution as well as other scientific discoveries), is likewise true of the history of society in all its branches and of the totality of all sciences which occupy themselves with things human (and divine)'. Both are governed by natural laws, though both had previously been though to be governed by supernatural laws. He goes on to point out that human history differs in that 'the actors are all endowed with consciousness' but this 'cannot alter the fact that the course of history is governed by inner general laws' (p. 622-3). This position is, to say the least, a simplification of Marx's own, who repeatedly warned of the dangers of such use of Darwinism. Although this statement is qualified by Engels, it becomes even simpler in the work of his immediate followers who develop the notion of 'dialectic' as a kind of universal law which governs physical and biological processes, and human society equally. From this type of position it is quite possible to slide into a view of human history as a simple extension of natural history, improved technology being merely the continuation of the biological adaptation of man, and society being an aspect of technological adaptation. With this perspective it became possible to argue that there is no need for different scientific and explanatory proceedures for intellectual, moral, social, and physical phenomena. Such an approach became extremely influential in Europe from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and is associated with the works of the French writer Comte who called it positivism. Engels criticizes repeatedly writers who take this view, but, at least as he was to be interpreted, he often appears to hold such a view himself.

One interesting aspect of this way of seeing Marxism in general is that it accords well with the kind of theories which Engels had applied to primitive societies only. This is not surprising since Engels's views on this subject were so strongly influenced by Morgan, himself a product of the current of opinion which stressed the total relevance of Darwinism. What therefore seems to occur in differing degrees during the period immediately

following Marx's death is that the theory which had been developed for primitive societies only begins to gain ground on all fronts. Consequently the work of anthropologists within the same intellectual framework as Morgan gains in prominence in Marxism generally.

For example, in the book on Feuerbach, referred to above, we find Engels accepting from the famous British anthropologist Tylor the idea that the origin of religion is to be explained as the direct result of such natural phenomena as dreaming. This kind of unhistorical explanation is totally unacceptable and improvable, but it fits in with the view that culture is little more than a complicated paraphrase of natural circumstances, a view which characterized the work of many nineteenth-century anthropologists. This position was of great importance in its implication for the significance to be given to the evolutionary sequences in Marxist works we discussed in the previous chapter. If history was directly governed by nature and technology in the way suggested above and was therefore ruled by immutable natural laws, it was only a short step to assuming that there must indeed be a single evolutionary path for all aspects of history, one which applied to all societies. This had only to be discovered through empirical research, by which all would be revealed. Such was Morgan's view and it was to a very large extent the view taken over and incorporated by Engels and even more uncritically by his circle of followers.

Such a conclusion is very much the one that was reached by the French revolutionary, Paul Lafargue. Lafargue was married to Marx's daughter and partly because of this stayed in close touch with Engels. His writings show in a somewhat exaggerated way the trend which followed Marx's death. He published two books in the anthropological tradition of The Origin. His second book, Le Determinisme

Economique, 1909, states quite boldly that the only reason why people are not all identical is because of the differences in their natural environment and the interaction of this environment with the technological stage they have reached. In such a scheme there really is no room at all for history as a human phenomenon. His theory of the origin of morality and religion owes as much to Engels as it does to Tylor, who as we saw was a major influence on the Marxists of this period. It reveals remarkably well the simplistic notion of causation which is in some places present in Engels but which comes largely from

anthropologists outside of the Marxist tradition. 'The idea of God', he tells us, \ .. is an *a posteriori* idea, as are all ideas since man can only think after having come into contact with the phenomena of the real world, which he then explains to the best of his abilities' (p. 296, my translation). His other earlier book on the origin of property, *La* Propriety, Origines *et Evolution,* published in 1895, is dedicated to Engels, and well it might be, as it contains practically nothing not said in *The* Origin, except that Lafargue seems to have an unerring instinct for emphasizing those aspects which have proved the most untenable in that work and ignoring the most valid ones. He stresses at great length the superiority of women in primitive societies, supporting this, in one of the rare places where he does not merely repeat Engels, with totally fallacious evidence about the relative brain size of men and women in primitive societies, a type of evidence which even in his time was open to doubt and which goes totally against the spirit of the whole of Marx's and Engels's work. He also, in a way that Marx and Engels were always at great pains not to do, gives the impression that communism will simply be a return to primitive communism. This earns him the attribute in a refutation of his work by the French conservative Guyot, of being a super-reactionary. The refutation was printed together with Lafargue's book, as a condition for publication.

Lafargue's work is only the reflection, a rather crude one, of the intellectual atmosphere of Marxism in the years up to 1917, an atmosphere which was to have much influence on Plekhanov and Lenin, and therefore on Soviet anthropology.

More significant than Lafargue is Kautsky. Lafargue was not a very important influence because he wrote in France, where Marxism was

largely peripheral until the First World War largely because of the dominating figure on the left of the non-Marxist Jaur6s. Kautsky, however, became a prominent Marxist leader in Germany, and this is where Marxism first became a major political force. Kautsky was for the critical period 1890-1905 considered the foremost Marxist theoretician and heir to Engels, and his writings were for a time seen as the continuation of those of the founders. As in Lafargue and the later works of Engels, the merging of Darwin and Marx is a major theme in his work, but this tendency is even more accentuated. Kautsky was an enthusiastic follower of Darwin and Spencer before he ever came across Marx, and it has often been suggested that his ideas

never really became fully Marxist but that rather he remained a 'social Darwinian'. This tendency is most explicit in an encyclopaedic work called The Materialist Conception of *History* which was published in 1931 long after he had ceased to have any influence on mainstream Marxists. It is therefore beyond our scope. His earlier work however is important It forms a whole with the work of the late Engels, with whom Kautsky was in continuous contact during his formative years. It helped for a time to define a kind of orthodoxy about the problems of evolution. The school of thought which was led by Kautsky is particularly important in that it included the Russian Plekhanov and thereby ultimately had a direct effect on Lenin.

Large numbers of Kautsky's early contributions to the newspaper he edited, Die Neue *Zeit,* concerned anthropological topics usually expanding on Engels's The Origin. He laid great stress, as had Marx and Engels, on the communal character of primitive society and heavily criticized those writers who saw primitive man as an individual, a kind of Robinson Crusoe, who built up society in order to further his own individual self-interest. In an article entitled 'The Indian Question' the position of Kautsky foreshadows clearly that of future Soviet writing. The reason why the American Indians were defeated, he explains, is because they had not gone far enough in the development of technology. That is all there is to it. Kautsky's is a clear statement of the primacy of technology as the determining factor in history, at least as it concerns primitives. It also confirms a particularly strong statement of the unilineal view of the history of mankind which is so prominent in the late Engels and Lafargue.

This unilineal view was inevitably closely associated with what was an almost apolitical fatalism. If, like the American Indians, you were not far enough along the line of human development you either were to be wiped out, because you lacked Darwinian fitness, or you had to wait for history to develop in its own mechanical way. The other tendency that we saw in the late Engels—to see human ideas as directly related to a poorly understood or mystified natural state—again takes the same form in Kautsky, with his repeated reference to the work of Tylor and especially his interpretation of the origins of religion in animism, a theory which keeps on reappearing among the early Marxists. The theory of animism was the idea that the first religious concept came from man's inability to understand the phenomenon of

dreaming. Man mistakes dreams for spirits or souls. The idea of soul then becomes replaced by the idea of gods and then by the idea of a single god. This is a theory without any foundation and is not accepted or even taken seriously by any modern anthropologists. Its individualistic character, one would have thought, would have made it particularly unsuitable for Marxists. Its adoption by such writers as Kautsky shows just how important the only two things which could have recommended it had become during this period. First its Darwinian, evolutionary overtones, and secondly its crude materialism. As before, and subsequently, the theories of anthropologists were to have a major role in this tendency in Marxism.

Kautsky's overall output is enormous and he again and again returned to anthropological topics, especially on the subject of religion. One of his books, the *Foundations of Christianity,* which he published in 1908, is of interest to anthropologists in that his discussion of the political potential of revivalist fundamentalist religious sects which have a millenarian character seems to herald the work of such writers as Worsley which we shall discuss below. He argues that such movements arise as a response to oppression and are a form of revolt. For Kautsky, Christianity was an example of such a movement directed against the Romans.

In order to understand the growing influence of determinist neo-Darwinian ideas in Marxist anthropology, it is necessary to go beyond the character of Engels's later work or of Kautsky's intellectual

formation. These were important but so were more directly political developments, especially the first major schism in the Marxist parties.

This was the so-called ‘reformist’ controversy which had a critical effect on the type of anthropology that was to be advocated in the post-revolutionary USSR. The split between the reformists, headed by E. Bernstein, previously an extremely close friend and colleague of Engels and Kautsky, and the more orthodox Marxists was many faceted and became very complex. Like all Marxist controversies it had political, theoretical, philosophical, and scientific sides. The political side was closely linked to the fact that the first important Marxist political party, the German Social Democratic party, was gaining great popular support and winning an important place in pre-First World War Germany. This importance meant that the party was faced with a

choice. On the one hand it could co-operate with German institutions and strive to bring about a reform of these institutions so that they became more like the liberal parliamentarian system found in England, and then work through such reformed institutions to push forward a socialist system. This was Bernstein’s position. On the other hand, it could ignore the Prussian system altogether and try to overthrow it, because reform was not possible and a revolution of some sort had to occur. This was the position adopted by the orthodox Marxists under Kautsky’s leadership. They argued that since the German state was, as Marx and Engels had shown of all such states, a repressive class institution, there was no way in which it could work for the proletariat. As the split deepened the reformists drifted further and further away, abandoning most Marxist principles in the process.

This schism seems remote from anthropology, but it is linked in the following way. The reformist position implied that it was possible for people to act in a socialist way in a non-socialist system. It implied that through political and moral pressure the economic and political system could be changed. In other words, for the reformists, ideas and institutions were not dependent on the social systems in which they occurred. This they made explicit by their approval of the revival of Kant’s views on morality and cognition which was taking place at the time in Germany and which was known as neo-Kantism. Kant had argued, in contrast to the eighteenth-century philosophers of the

Enlightenment, who believed that the advance of science would reform society, that natural phenomena cannot of themselves become justification one way or another for morality. For the reformists, morality and politics had therefore to come from somewhere else, not just from the material conditions of existence, and furthermore, since morality and politics are the driving forces of action, there is nothing about human history that is given in material circumstances. In this way, what had started off as a problem of political judgment ended up as a challenge to the whole Marxist theory of history and to its philosophical basis. (Lichtheim, 1961.)

It is interesting to note that in many ways the Marxists who focussed on the later work of Engels, such as Lafargue and Kautsky, to mention the two we have already referred to, 'asked for it'. They had emphasized the unilineal evolution of society governed by laws akin to those discussed by Darwin for the

natural sciences. In such a perspective, history becomes an entirely mechanical matter in which human action has barely any relevant influence. Such a position can lead, as has been repeatedly pointed out, to a passive attitude to politics. History will happen irrespective of the way individuals try to affect it. Such a position in fact well illustrates Kant's point that knowledge of nature gives no basis for any kind of morality, and so it is not surprising that the formation of Marxism given by the late Engels and Kautsky was open to attack from people who in any case wanted to undermine the politics of the Marxists.

It is, of course, a matter of debate how much the older Engels and his other associates really took simply a natural-science view of history. Marx had again and again fought against such a view and Engels and Plekhanov (who will be considered below) tried to maintain his position, but they often seem to slip into a 'natural determinist position'. In fact Marx himself is somewhat ambiguous on the point, shifting his position in different places of his works, but he quite clearly is much 'less' of a mechanical determinist than the Engels of the book on Feuerbach, which is itself less determinist than Kautsky or Lafargue's work. The revisionist controversy, however, gave the final push in the orthodox camp towards a strict position of economic or

even technological determinism. This was because the alternative reformism was associated with political betrayal.

The process which had begun as a result of the fact that, of the works of Marx and Engels concerned with anthropology, only The Origin was available, and which had continued as a result of the growing influence of the Darwinism of Kautsky's own training, was completed by the antithetical process of schism. The emphasis on a mechanical view of history which developed according to natural laws was emphasized and the corollary of this conception of history, that ideas are mere epiphenomena of environment and technology became dominant. Since this view had only been clearly expressed by Engels in his remarks about primitive society, the role of Marxist anthropology as the carrier of this version of orthodoxy became central.

In this way, by 1905 the orthodox Marxist position had become one which stressed the primacy of technological development as the motive force of history and which systematically denied any historical significance to consciousness. Human history had become the unfolding of an inevitable mechanism unaffected by

the ideas of men. It was a unilineal history since such an automatic progress could not account for variety, except for variety simply due to natural environment.

As an example of this position it is interesting to consider the work of G. V. Plekhanov, especially his book, *Fundamental Problems of* Marxism, published in 1908. Plekhanov is important in that he forms a link between Engels, with whom he worked, and Russia. He translated several of the works of the founders into Russian and was involved with the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Although he was a supporter of a different faction of the revolutionary party than Lenin-he was a Menshevik (see below) — many of his ideas reflect closely those which were to be accepted in the USSR after the Revolution. Lenin wrote: 'the only Marxist in the international Social-Democratic movement to criticize the incredible platitudes of the reformists from the standpoint of consistent dialectical materialism was Plekhanov.' (Lenin, Marxism and Revisionism, 27.)

Fundamental Problems *of* Marxism is an attempt on the one hand to fight the reformists, and on the other to combat overly determinist views of history which rule out any role for conscious human activity, including political action. Plekhanov, therefore, quotes approvingly Marx's repudiation of simple materialist explanations, such as those of the eighteenth-century writers who explained all aspects of culture as growing directly out of material conditions. 'Thus Marx reproached the earlier materialists with having forgotten that if men are products of circumstances... it is men that change circumstances' (p. 18), but this qualification does not seem to apply to primitive society, and indeed his lengthy discussion of primitives is explained in terms of the fact that they demonstrate materialism at its simplest. 'In primitive society, which knows no division into classes, men's productive activities exert a direct [my italics] influence on his world outlook and his aesthetic taste . . . This is why I referred chiefly to them when I was discussing the dependence of primitive man's mentality on his activities in the economy he conducts.' (70-1.) Primitive society is there to be used for the other flank of his attack, against writers such as the reformists, who had believed that consciousness was independent of material conditions. This division of the argument is interesting in many ways. First it is a totally explicit statement of what is necessarily implied by Engels's radical distinction between the time before and after *the*

origin of the family, private property, and the State: that social causation is different for primitives (although it is not clear who is included under that label in Plekhanov's work). It also shows the continuing role which reference to primitives has in Marxist polemics. The recourse to anthropology is always in order to demonstrate evolution, unilinealism, and direct determination. It is for this reason that anthropology has always been central to the more Darwinist theoretical and political positions of the classical Marxists.

The reason given for the fundamental difference between primitives and capitalism is that, in the latter stage, consciousness and history take on a totally different character because of the class struggle. This idea follows from the proposition expressed by Marx and Engels in The German ideology (a book unknown to Plekhanov) and elsewhere that, in class society, history is moulded by the struggle between the

consciousness of different classes. But the idea only follows if it is taken together with Engels's assertion that primitive societies are classless.

When we turn to what Plekhanov has to say about primitives, he is, as we would expect, quite categorical about technological causation, except that he adds a new emphasis of his own: the importance of geography. The significance of geographical factors as modifying the single-minded progresss of history is something we have already come across in Lafargue and also, to a certain extent, in Engels when he explains, following Morgan, the difference in evolution between the western and eastern hemispheres in terms of the absence of suitable animals for domestication in the America's. The emphasis on geography is, however, much stronger in Plekhanov and is due to yet another group of anthropologists: the anthropo-geographical school in German anthropology. The anthropo-geographical school is little remembered by anthropologists, although it is better known by historians of geographical thought. This school was also to have a critical role on the development of American anthropology in that, as we shall see, many of the ideas of the founder of modern American anthropology, Boas, were formulated in reaction to it. The founder of the school was a geographer called Ritter, but it was mainly his pupil Ratzel who influenced Plekhanov and Boas, although in different ways.

The main tenet of the anthropo-geographical school was that environment determines the culture of people who live in it. It is

therefore another particularly simple example of a crude materialism which, combined with the influence of Morgan and Tylor, constitutes an important contribution to Marxism. This crude materialism, applied to primitives in the first place, was to characterize much Soviet anthropology. The interesting thing, however, is that its origin is much more anthropological than Marxist. Plekhanov echoes Ratzel exactly when he writes: 'Thus the properties of the geographical environment determine the development of the productive forces which in its turn determines the development of the economic forces and therefore of all other social relations.' (P. 51.) On the same page Plekhanov goes on to give examples of this line of causation with anthropological material from far and wide, such as on the Masai of East Africa and the Australian Aborigines. Significantly, like Engels and Lafargue, he also

introduces Tylor's theories about the origin of religion to illustrate the material basis of belief.

With Plekhanov vye are at the starting point of Soviet anthropology. This starting point has been reached in part because of the emphasis given to Marxism by Engels, and in part in reaction to the reformist controversy. It is a starting point where technology and geography are seen as the only relevant causes of culture, and where a clear unilineal and evolutionary sequence has been laid down. It is a tradition in which the influence of several non-Marxist materialist anthropologists, Morgan, Tylor, and Ratzel, have great significance. The reason for their influence was due to the fact that once Engels, as a result of merging the rhetorical and the historical uses of anthropology, had produced a pre-class stage of human history, he left Marxists without a theory to handle these societies. They naturally turned to the much less fruitful formulations of early anthropologists and took on board at the same time the positivism which characterized these writings. Although this process was in part due to writers such as Kautsky, whom the Soviets were to repudiate, what happened between 1895 and 1917 none the less proved determinant not only for Soviet anthropology but, as we shall see, also indirectly for some American anthropology.

Soviet anthropology was set from its beginnings on what appears a fixed course based on the particular version of Marxism it received. Referring to Engels's The Origin, two Soviet anthropologists felt able to write in 1964: 'On the basis of analysis and interpretation of vast new factual archaeological and ethno-

graphic data accumulated since the publication of Engels' classic work, Soviet ethnographers have demonstrated persuasively that his conclusions not only have not been shaken but are confirmed by the most recent material taken in its entirety.' (Tolstov and Zhdanko, 1964-5:15.)

This appearance of theoretical permanence, not to say fossili-zation, however, hides the fact that Soviet anthropology has been, as previous Marxist anthropology had been before, a privileged area of Marxist theoretical controversy.

Lenin's and Soviet interest in anthropology turned on two related questions. Lenin was concerned with how to deal with the ethnic diversity of the USSR, and he encouraged a great amount of ethnographic research on which to base policies. Secondly, the revolution threw up with particular urgency the problem of the peasantry.

The place of the peasantry has always been a particularly acute problem for Soviet anthropologists because of the problem that the Marxist revolution, heralded by Marx and Engels as the work of the proletariat, occurred in a country where the proletariat was small in comparison to the peasantry. This is all the more important in that the Marxist movement in Russia defined itself by stressing the contrast between themselves and an earlier socialist movement mainly characterized by the way it extolled the communal spirit of the peasantry, and which planned to bring about reform by reactivating the ancient virtues which lay dormant in the peasant communes. This group, called the Narodniks, influenced, and was influenced by, die romantic theories of Kovalesky and other historians who believed that peasants had somehow retained the virtues of primitive communism untainted by the State or capitalism. The views of Kovalesky had quite a marked influence on Marx and an even stronger one on Engels. On the other hand, the Russian Marxists, with closer contacts with the reality of the situation, had little faith in the peasants' ability to organize themselves into a revolutionary force, or to reform society. They, in contrast to Marx and Engels, believed that the peasantry could only bring about a liberal revolution, like the French Revolution, and that a country like Russia, with a small proletariat, would have to wait for the disappearance of the peasantry before it had a socialist revolution. Embodied in this view is the strict unilineal conception of historical evolution that we saw developing up to the time of the

revolution, as a result of the growing Darwinist influence in Marxist thought in the early years of this century. The stages had been laid down and there was no question of skipping one of them. Implied also in this attitude was the lack of significance attributed to political action, especially in a country like Russia, where an attempt to bring about socialism would be simply premature. Politics could not help in

changing the course of history; one just had to wait for the developing course of evolution. The peasantry therefore could not be effective in bringing about a different brand of purely Russian socialism, as the Narodniks believed, nor could it contribute to a socialist revolution, since it belonged to an earlier stage.

The background to this position is important. Marx and Engels seem to have oscillated between an attitude of hostility to the peasantry and one of rather vague, romantic admiration. In an early work by Marx, The Eighteenth *Brumaire of Louis Napoleon,* Marx stresses the divided nature of the peasantry, and their reactionary influence on politics, while in *Forme*n, as we noted, Marx sees the peasants as examples of community and purity. This view was later strongly echoed in a work by Engels, Die Mark. It was however, Kautsky who began to seriously build up a Marxist theory of the peasantry and inevitably in such hands, and in the context of the reformist split, his argument stressed the precise place of the peasantry in the evolutionary sequence, which had become all-important.

This argument became of critical importance for the next major split in the communist movement, the split between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. It occurred before and during the Soviet revolution. It placed on the Menshevik side some of the major Marxist theoreticians such as Plekhanov himself, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg, and on the other Lenin. The Mensheviks maintained a rigid evolutionary view which gave no creative role to the peasants in a socialist revolution, since they represented a stage too early in the sequence to lead to socialism. It is not surprising that Lenin, above all a practical revolutionary, and the revolutionary grass roots organization of the Bolsheviks in Russia, were little impressed by the defeatism and academicism of this argument, since it seemed to rule out the possibility of a socialist revolution for their country. Lenin, by contrast, wanted as much as possible the support of the peasants, and he was not going to ignore them. However, involvement of the peasants in the revolu-

tion seemed, as the Mensheviks had pointed out, to contradict the evolutionary views of Marxism. This was the problem which Marxist Bolshevik theoreticians had to deal with. The problem was also

practical as it concerned the policy the Soviets should adopt towards the peasants during and after the Revolution.

Lenin's own policy, which became, for a while at least, the official policy of the USSR, was something of a judgement of Solomon between the Narodniks and the Mensheviks. Lenin criticized the nationalist romantic view of the Narodniks and their post-revolutionary heirs, the populists, by pointing out that the existence of the State, partly feudal, partly capitalist, in prerevolutionary Russia, had brought about the breakup of the traditional community to such an extent that any attempt to revive it would be impossible. In particular he noted that reforms immediately preceding the Revolution had introduced sharp divisions and stratification within the Russian peasant communities themselves. The result of this situation was that the poorer peasants were not very different from the urban proletarians, and could therefore be considered as class allies of the workers and trusted with a positive revolutionary role. The rich peasants, however, the kulaks, who had benefited from Tsarist reforms, were likely to be attached either to the old regime or to a liberal type of government and so they could not be trusted as allies of the Soviet Revolution. This last point was particularly important because it meant that for Lenin any revival of traditional communal organization among the peasants, as had been envisaged by the populists, would simply lead to the domination of the peasant communities by the rich peasants, since they were in a position of strength in these communities, and ultimately to a counter-revolutionary peasant body. Lenin therefore decided to stress and indeed encourage class antagonism among the peasants so as to arouse the proletarian consciousness of the poor peasants and make them resist the growing domination of the rich peasants. In this way, unlike the Mensheviks, Lenin saw that the peasants had a revolutionary role to play in a socialist revolution, but unlike the Narodniks it was only some of the peasants some of the time.

Lenin's view of the peasantry as essentially divided is one which has had influence on recent Western anthropologists, as we shall see when we refer to the work of E. Wolf, although they have great difficulty in saying what peasant classes are. The

unified organic view of earlier Marxists, including Marx and Engels, about the Russian peasant community seems now very much a romantic outsider's view. Lenin, by contrast to these other writers, paid special attention to the significance of the central politico-economic system for the interior workings of the community, something which earlier politicians, anthropologists, and historians had overlooked. Similarly he pays special attention to internal stratification within the peasant community, again something which has only recently been looked at carefully in anthropology.

The Bolshevik theory of the peasantry was, however, to have more immediate significance for Marxist anthropology. The significance of Lenin's and other Bolsheviks' view of the Russian peasantry is that it placed the peasants in the orbit of history and class conflict, while the view which stressed the organic unchangeableness of the peasant communes had removed them from this central concern of Marxism and had placed them in the pre-class period when Marxist principles were by and large irrelevant. In many ways Lenin's view was a much more orthodox Marxist view than the rival one, in that it accorded well with Marx's famous remark in The Communist *Manifesto* that 'the history of all existing societies is the history of class struggles'. On the other hand, it was also less orthodox in that it seemed to deny the communist values of eastern European peasant communities so praised by Marx and especially Engels.

Lenin's and the Bolsheviks' reactions against the determinist views of such writers as Kautsky and the Mensheviks might be thought to have pushed Marxist anthropology away from the technological determinism of these writers, since we have seen that this went hand in hand with a rigid unilinear view of social evolution. Lenin's view stressed the significance of political action against the evolutionary fatalism implied by strict unilineal evolutionism. He also seems to envisage a much more complex relation between technology and social organization when he sees the specific history of the Tsarist state as transforming the political position of the peasants without inevitably changing their way of life on a day to day basis. However, these implications, significant as they were for Soviet Marxism in general, were of relatively minor importance for anthropology. The reason is

that Lenin's stress on the presence of class divisions within the peasant community simply pushed them on the other side of the

great divide which Engels had created in The Origin and which had been further emphasized by Plekhanov. Indeed, in spite of the fact that Plekhanov was a Menshevik, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had little difficulty in retaining his position as regards primitives, even though they disagreed with him as regards the peasants.

There is, however, one area where the Bolsheviks' position did have direct implications for anthropology, and that concerns Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production. Engels's view of Russia as an example of the Asiatic mode of production is in clear conflict with Lenin's view of the significance of class for the internal organization of the peasantry. Engels had written two years before the publication of The Origin, 'The form taken by the power of the state depends on the form taken by social groups at a particular time. Where, as with the Aryan people of Asia and the Russians, the social group still tills the soil collectively, or where the social group allocates land to individual families for a certain period, where therefore no land is yet privately owned, the power of the state manifests itself in despotism.' (Quoted in Godelier, 1978: 230.) This view of Russia is one which was clearly unacceptable to Lenin, given his views of the internal divisions of peasant communities, although it is true that even he spoke in several places of the Tsarist state as 'semi-Asiatic'.

Quite apart from its application to Russia in particular, the concept of an Asiatic mode of production was in general incompatible with Marxist theory as understood in the Soviet Union. The Asiatic mode of production implied the possibility of a state without classes, or at least the existence of a state without the corrosive effect of classes on the internal working of the community, as this was given as the explanation for the supposed immobility of Asian systems. The theory of the Asiatic mode of production seemed therefore to undermine Marxism in general on two counts. The central place given to class conflict in history seemed to be negated, since it appeared to be a case of classes without class conflict. Secondly, it also negated or modified the theory of the State as a weapon in this conflict. It is not surprising therefore that much of the early theoretical effort of

Soviet anthropology was negative and consisted in the rooting out of the notion of the Asiatic mode of production, largely by reinterpreting the societies which had previously been seen as corresponding to this mode of production in terms of feudalism or of the rather vague concept of military democracy. This whole process was of

course made justifiable by pointing out that in the most coherent statement of the social evolutionary theory of the founders of Marxism, The Origin, there was no mention of the Asiatic mode of production. Some Soviet anthropologists deduced, therefore, that Marx and Engels had, between the time of *Capital* and of The Origin, abandoned the conqept. Whether this is so or not has remained something of a point of contention (see Godelier, 1978; Koranashvili, 1980) but it is clear that the concept is in theoretical conflict with the Leninist view of the peasantry divided in classes.

The bitterness with which the notion of the Asiatic mode of production was viewed in the Soviet Union is in part related to the fact that the concept was used rather arbitrarily as a criticism of the USSR under Stalin, first by some Trotskists, and then by K. Wittfogel in his book *Oriental* Despotism: A comparative study *of total power.* Although first published in 1957, this book re-echoed theses already outlined in the 1920s in Germany, Wittfogel's original home. The book is a strange combination of a scientific study of societies based on large-scale irrigation, such as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China, and an anti-Soviet tract. In this way it pushed the Marxist principle of the unity of theory and practice to an extraordinary if bizarre length.

The first aspect of the book seems a straight development of the position we have seen, for example, in Plekhanov: a combination of ideas from Marx and Engels about evolution centring on the property-exploitation complex, together with the geographical determinism of Ratzel. This theoretical combination is made to give flesh and bones to the scattered references in Marx and Engels which associates the Asiatic mode of production, despotism (a concept inherited by Marx from eighteenth-century writers such as Montesquieu), and large-scale irrigation. Wittfogel seeks to demonstrate in his book how the only way independent self-sustaining peasant communities can be welded together to undertake large-scale public works, such as

irrigation, is through despotic government. Wittfogel's explanations have been much challenged and cannot be accepted in their entirety, but on the whole their scholarly character has not been denied, as we shall see below. His hypothesis has been extremely stimulating to many anthropologists, especially American anthropologists of the cultural ecology school.

This anthropological study is oddly combined, however, with an attack on the Soviet Union. Wittfogel had been a member of the

Communist Party in post-First World War Germany, which was strongly influenced by such Mensheviks as Rosa Luxemburg. He turned from them, however, especially after his flight to the United States after the Nazi take-over in Germany. It was in the United States that he developed the anti-Soviet side of his theory. He noted that Marx and Engels had at first stressed the Asiatic mode of production but had later dropped it, and that it had been systematically ignored in the USSR since then. The reason for this was that, according to Wittfogel, that Marx, Engels, and even Lenin became aware of the despotic character of a potential communist state, especially one based in Russia, because they saw that Russia was at the stage of the Asiatic mode of production. This mode of production and its associated despotism were what was happening in the USSR, and Stalin was just following in the footsteps of other Asiatic rulers. *Oriental Despotism* at one stroke was therefore a demonstration of a theory of the history of society, a demonstration of the perceptiveness of Marx and Engels, and a denunciation of despotism in the USSR. With this type of advocate for the Asiatic mode of production it is not surprising that it became for a time an even less popular concept in Soviet anthropology.

The Bolshevik arguments about the peasantry and the dropping of the Asiatic mode of production show well how practical, political problems continued to determine anthropological concerns for academic Marxists. They also show how at different times these political concerns pushed in different directions. As a result Soviet anthropology seems to manifest a tendency to oscillate between two poles, one the unilineal evolutionism of The Origin, and its associated Darwinism, and the other the more complex Marxism which focuses on class conflict and the historical theory outlined in The *Preface to a* Critique *of*

Political Economy. As a result it is useful to distinguish at least three stages in Soviet anthropology.

Following the success of the Revolution, in the 1920s and 30s there was a great burgeoning of detailed, descriptive ethnographic studies in the Soviet Union. This was linked with a genuine attempt to understand the attitudes, position, and stage of development of the more remote peoples of the USSR. This descriptive work was accompanied by the development of many theoretical debates. One of the central interests of Soviet writers of the 1930s was the theoretical question raised by Engels in *The* Origin over what were the causal factors of history in very early

forms of social organization. Engels had argued that relations between people in early stages of the history of mankind were simply based on biology and this produced the kinship system known as the horde, the very first stage of Morgan's scheme. There was no institutionalization of these de *facto* relationships and such institutionalization only occurred with the growth of the State, private property, and classes. Sexual and parental relationships had nothing to do with material production since this transforming of human relations into relations of production was the result of the growth and development of private property. According to The *Origin* primitive society was free of determination by the productive process, which applied to more modern society, primitive society was simply governed by the requirements of biological reproduction. It followed therefore that primitive society was governed not by social laws but by biological laws, and these followed Darwinian natural selection for Engels, which he assumed would operate directly on pre-origin society. For example, the passage from primitive promiscuity to pairing marriages was brought about simply because the latter form produced groups which were genetically more fit. Determination by the mode of production only came later.

This pre-class stage was, as we have seen, the product of the merging of the rhetorical and the historical use of anthropology. It seems totally unjustified on the basis of further research and, furthermore, the construction of such a stage opened the door to the inclusion in Marxism of the theories of positivist anthropologists and others.

Given this background it is interesting to find that, right from the first, Soviet anthropologists challenged the break in history suggested in The Origin and even questioned whether such a primitive stage had ever existed. The discussion on the sharpness of the break before and after The Origin was further obscured because Soviet anthropologists began to try to add to Engels's scheme data from contemporary discoveries in physical anthropology and to link up 'the origin' with the emergence of homo sapiens. The result was extraordinarily complicated and totally unhelpful in itself, since anthropologists had no reliable information about the social organization of very early man: however, this discussion revealed a genuine attempt on the part of anthropologists to challenge pre-origin biological determinism in a number of ways which foreshadow later discussion.

The other area of controversy centred around the historical

validity of Engels's and Morgan's representation of the primitive stages. All manner of objections about the nature of the gens stage were raised; especially the suggestion was made that the earliest groups might have been based on locality rather than on kinship. The significance of this suggestion seems to be that it too was a challenge to the purely biological nature of primitive society. There were also other kinds of objections. For example, L. V. Danilova (1971: 277) points out that some early Soviet anthropologists had argued that there had never been evidence for the primitive promiscuity of the earliest stages, an essential ingredient in Engels's and Morgan's theory.

These early challenges and the whole period of challenge to orthodoxy which they implied was, however, short lived. Stalinism, and the disruption of the war soon put an end to it. During this second period detailed ethnographic and linguistic work continued as the production of various ethnographic atlases shows. But in terms of theory, Soviet anthropology seems, from the outside at least, to have plunged into a period of orthodoxy and fossilization.

In various works, Stalin gave the seal of approval to what was little more than a simplified version of Engels. This was what has been called the five-stage theory. According to this mankind always went, and always would go, through a succession of five stages: primitive

society, ancient or slave society, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. The order had been set down by Engels and it was not to be tampered with. The job of anthropologists was simply to illustrate the sequence by suitable examples, not to try to alter it. The result was that Soviet anthropologists by and large avoided theory altogether and turned simply to ethnographic description, preferably in such unproblematical areas as language and material culture.

It was only during the third period, the period following de-Stalinization in the late 1950s and early 1960s that the debates of the first period were resumed and with renewed vigour. Apart from political changes, the growing knowledge of works by Marx and Engels concerning pre-capitalist societies other than The Origin, and an increased acquaintance with the work of Western, especially French Marxist anthropologists, meant that it became possible to challenge the five stages without being anti-Marxist. In particular the anomalous first stage again came under critical scrutiny. Already many Soviet anthropologists had rejected the

primacy of matriliny over patriliny, but this was followed by an even more basic challenge, a rejection of the hypothesis that kinship-based groups are the basis of all early society. (N. A. Butinov, V. M. Bakhta, and V. R. Kabo referred to in Danilova, op. cit.) The arguments of the writers who presented this position rests in part on the recorded absence of descent groups among many hunters and gatherers, but above all on a particular problem which arises from the very nature of descent groups. Most descent groups, as had been noted by Engels, are exogamous; that is, they forbid marriage within the group. This means that at least half the adult members of the group are likely to be dispersed into the territory of other descent groups; that is, the territory of the descent group of their spouses. The non-correspondence of locality and descent groups, especially in the case of matrilineal descent, has been often discussed by western anthropologists (Gluckman, 1955; Richards, 1950) and the Soviet anthropologists who make this point base themselves in part on these findings. Because descent groups cannot normally be fully localized in one place, they argued that the original human grouping is the local group, not the kinship group. This modification has profound theoretical implications since the local

group implies a society based on co-operative economic activity, not on biology. The modification implies, as Danilova shows well, the rejection of a period of human development which is pre-social and pre-economic. This effectively removes the theoretical oddity introduced by Engels's pre-origin stage, but at the same time it raises questions about how far the post-origin theory is applicable to primitive society. In fact, Soviet anthropologists do not seem to have fully discussed this implication.

The challenge of Soviet anthropologists to the orthodoxy of the five stages has other far-reaching implications. It makes the local community, rather than kinship, the basis of the primitive community and this demotes kinship from the central place in the evolutionary scheme which it clearly had held for Morgan and Engels. It is significant in this that, as a result, some writers have been led to cast doubt on the use made by Morgan of terminologies (Kriukov, 1972) a topic discussed in the previous chapter.

Finally, some Soviet anthropologists not only made descent less central but argued that patriliny, matriliny, or bilateral kinship were simply alternatives, rather than successive stages. Quite apart from this being a much more satisfactory view, such a point

reintroduces the notion of multilineal evolution which had faded with the exclusion of the Asiatic mode of production.

The idea of multilineal evolution seems to have been recently very widely accepted by many Soviet anthropologists. Multilineal evolution is the view that, although general principles may govern human evolution, every ethnographic and historical case is different, at least superficially. It implies the presence of different specific evolutionary lines in different places and only a general unitary tendency. According to such theories not all societies need go through the same stages, especially because of the influence different societies at different stages have on each other.

With this kind of point of view, it is not surprising to find that several Soviet anthropologists under the influence of French anthropologists,

especially M. Godelier, have reintroduced the notion of the Asiatic mode of production, either as an intermediary stage between primitive communism and feudalism, or as an alternative route from primitive communism. Indeed the acceptance or refusal of the notion of the Asiatic mode of production has been something of a symbolical device to indicate whether writers adhered to the strict determinism of traditional Soviet anthropology, with its acceptance of technological determination, or whether they sought to replace it by a more flexible and more complex view of historical determination, developed from Marx's writing about capitalism and the letter to Zasulich. Less radical, but equally important, have been suggestions modifying the correlation of State and class which we saw put forward in the work of Engels, especially in the light of information on early African states. This topic is discussed in an article by Gellner which reviews critically the work of the Soviet anthropologist Kubbel. Kubbel argues that in early Ghana there was some sort of governmental institution before the State (Gellner 1977). Such a position raises the question of what exactly is meant by a state. If it is argued that a state without class is not a true state then the Kubbel findings do not appear as a direct challenge to orthodoxy. None the less the modification is clearly serious in its implications.

In fact nearly all the objections which have been raised against the theories put forward in The *Origin* in Chapter 3 seem to have been made by one Soviet anthropologist or another in recent years although in no case has this led to a total rejection nor a clear overall reformulation.

This, of course, is not to say that orthodoxy is not defended. Nikiforov, another influential Soviet anthropologist, has, for example, defended the exclusion of the Asiatic mode of production against those of his colleagues who had succumbed to the French influence. In this he differs from Yuri Semenov who, in certain other respects, is one of the greated defenders of the traditional view. Semenov reintroduces the notion of the Asiatic mode of production but, in order to rid it of its anomalous geographical specificity, calls it 'politocracy'. Semenov is a major writer who over the years has developed a particularly all-embracing view of human evolution, basing himself on

recent discoveries from both East and West. His conclusions are in many ways closer to those of Morgan and Engels than are those of many of his colleagues. For example, he defends the idea of the primacy of the gens and kinship by arguing that exogamy is not really a problem to the general theory, since marriage at that period did not involve the residence of both spouses in the same place, and therefore the gens could still be a local group. In this he re-echoes earlier views but accepts an earlier appearance of marriage than had been allowed for by Engels.

In a much more elaborate work, also discussed by Gellner (1980), The Theory *of* Socio-economic Formations *and World History,* he attempts to return to unilineal and chronological interpretation of evolution with only some modification from the classical theory. The main modification to the orthodox view which Semenov concedes is that not all societies need go through all stages. For him, although history follows a single line of succession of stages, this applies to world history taken as a whole. By that he means that, although not all societies at a particular time are at the same stage, the leading society is at that stage, and the presence of such an advanced society marks the relevant stage of the rest of the world. The capitalist stage was marked by the leadership of Western Europe, especially by Great Britain, and the rest of the world was as it was precisely because it formed a kind of background to western capitalism. Thus although other societies were not capitalist in themselves they were part of the capitalist stage. Because of this there is no need for all parts of the world to go through the stage of capitalism for themselves. They may either take over the lead from the previous leaders, and thus enter the stage which follows capitalism even though they did not pass through capitalism, or they may become

part of the periphery of other societies which have passed on to this next stage. For Semenov, after the capitalist period, the world entered the Socialist stage and stage leadership passed from Great Britain to the Soviet Union, and the same process of periperalization will no doubt take place in other locations. As Gellner points out, it is not clear just how all this applies to the very earliest stages, but by means of this type of world-development theory Semenov is able to restore almost completely the original Plekhanov type of scheme.

This brief and incomplete review of recent Soviet anthropology shows how very difficult it is to evaluate present-day Soviet anthropology, because of its great diversity. Modern Soviet anthropologists seem much better ethnographically informed than they were during the time of Stalin. Of course they try to adapt this data to their overall theoretical scheme, but in that they are no different from other anthropologists from other schools. They are clearly willing to recognize factual objections to their theories and modify these theories in the light of new information. Nevertheless, the overall framework inherited from Morgan, Tylor, Ratzel, and Kovalesky, via Marx, Engels, and Plekhanov remains, in spite of the severe modifications that many Soviet anthropologists have brought to it.

Often the fact that Soviet anthropologists retain an evolutionary framework at all is often enough for many Western anthropologists to dismiss their work. This, however, they do from a very weak position. Seen from a Soviet point of view those anthropologists who deny any kind of evolutionary framework are just refusing to ask fundamental questions for fear of what they might find. This criticism seems to me very largely justified. When we look at the work of these Western anthropologists who would be most horrified to be labelled evolutionist, we find that their work continually implies unexamined evolutionary assumptions. The assumption of evolution exists in the very terms they use, as for example when they talk of primitives, or pre-literate societies, or of simple societies. This unexamined evolutionism is also evident when Western anthropologists try to generalize from their findings. For example, when Fortes states that descent groups are broken down when states evolve, he is obviously making an evolutionary statement. Western anthropology is peppered with such examples. This means that the non-evolutionism of many Western anthropologists appears to Soviet anthropologists as

either laziness or dishonesty. Non-evolutionist Western anthropologists just seem to avoid the implications of their conclusions in a way that Soviet anthropologists do not. Those few Western anthropologists who do openly accept an evolutionary framework seem as well but no better informed than Soviet evolutionists, and they have to make as many assumptions which are as yet undemonstrable, this is the case with such writers as the British anthropologist J. Goody, American

anthropologists of the cultural ecology school, or a French anthropologist such as Levi-Strauss, in The *Elementary Structures of* Kinship (see below for discussion of these).

The refusal to look carefully at the full implications of their work by anti-evolutionary Western anthropologists has meant that Soviet anthropologists have felt that they could dismiss such work or use it simply to provide occasional ethnographic data. As a result, Soviet anthropologists have only commented on the work of the few Western anthropologists who adopt some sort of evolutionary framework. This seems to me an inevitable result of the extraordinary theoretical cowardice of much non-Marxist anthropology, but the avoidance has also had a bad effect on Soviet anthropology itself, in that it has enabled it to ignore many of the more challenging implications of the detailed findings of Western anthropology.

The main area where Soviet anthropology seems to be almost wantonly ignoring the evidence available is in its continuing conceptualization of classless primitive communities. The political reason for this is made quite clear in an article by A. Pershits (1974), and is noted by both Dunn (1979) and Gellner. As we saw, Marx and Engels had insisted on the idea of the classless communal primitive society in order to stress how such things as the family, the State, etc. were historical products of a particular kind of exploitation at a particular time. The rhetoric of the argument enabled them to prove the temporary exploitative nature of bourgeois society by stating its opposite: that without class all these things were absent. Marx, right from the first, considered as reactionary views such as those of Maine, who argued that the family had always existed, as these views seemed to him legitimations for the bourgeois family of the time. Soviet anthropologists have followed Marx in this and have seen assertions about the universality of the family in the works of such anthropologists as Malinowski or Murdock as similar

reactionary legitimations. As a result their view of the classless primitive community has remained a major political tenet for Soviet writers, and to deny its existence is for them tantamount to denying the class character of bourgeois society and the possibility of transcending class society to communism.

This is such an important argument that the idea of the classless unexploitative community is not easily abandoned or even modified. As a result, the arguments which have been brought to bear to maintain the theory of group marriage, of the absence of the State in primitive societies, or the absence of the nuclear family complex in certain primitive societies, seem particularly disingenuous. This seems unfortunate because it does not seem that the general argument, with which I sympathize, in fact depends on the vague notion of communistic primitive society at all. As we have seen, most anthropologists have no difficulty in accepting Marx's and Engels's central point about the impermanence of the family in the form in which it exists under capitalism, and the way it is linked up organically with a particular social system. Many Western anthropologists would also accept that the family of Western Europe was the product of capitalist relations of production. Many would totally reject the Murdockian and Malinowskian idea of the universality of the family; there is so much variation of familial forms that, to say that the family is universal is totally unhelpful; it is only right if the statement is reduced to a tautology. Furthermore, some, including myself, are even prepared to accept Marx's point that those who stress the universality of the family are making a particularly strong ideological statement. It is possible to accept all of these points and still to reject the idea that there is no economic exploitation in primitive societies, that there are permanent domestic groups often of a monogamous character (but different from those of Western society since they occur in different social contexts), and that there is a wide variation relating to these aspects in different primitive systems. To accept these points and to abandon the unitary view of the classless, exploitation-free, primitive community seems to me to have no reactionary political implications. This however Soviet anthropologists seem unable to do.

The reasons seem to lie deeper than might appear at first sight. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the history of Marxism from the death of Marx until the Soviet Revolution saw

the growth of a simple theory of technological determinism which, although at first it almost applied only to primitive society, it grew to almost rival more central Marxist theories. This theory was introduced as a result of the search for an alternative social theory to Marxism in

order to deal with classless primitive society. This was necessary because, if primitive societies were classless, Marx's theory did not apply to them. This means that if now Soviet anthropologists were to recognize the existence of classlike phenomena in primitive societies they would have to abandon not just an historical conclusion but, more fundamentally, the simple positivism which they had taken on board with the ideas of Morgan, Tylor, and Ratzel, and they would have to replace this by the ideas of *Capital.* This would be a fundamental and revolutionary task, and it is not so surprising that they hesitate, although, as we shall see, this is precisely what modern French Marxist anthropologists have attempted to do.

5. Marxism and American Anthropology

The relation between Marxism and American anthropology is for the most part negative. It is partly one of mutual ignorance and partly one of hostility, yet in many ways American anthropology and Marxism are connected.

First of all there is the relationship we have already discussed between one of the founders of American anthropology, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Marx and Engels. Morgan's influence on the anthropology of his own country was also strong until the First World War. This meant that Marxists and American anthropologists shared a very important starting point. However, the use that these two groups made of Morgan's work was very different right from the start. American anthropologists were at first enthusiastic in their adherence to evolutionary notions but in the period following Morgan's work added little except a number of misleading ideas and racialist assumptions. This explains why, after 1918, evolutionary approaches in the United States came into growing disrepute, and as a result the direct Marxist anthropological tradition disappeared almost totally in the United States. This rejection was linked with the development of a new type of anthropology which is usually referred to as 'cultural anthropology'.

The hallmark of cultural anthropologists is not so much their opposition to evolutionary theory as their distrust of any generalization which is not fully documented by a method resembling the classical historical methods of the nineteenth century. Evolutionary theory was unacceptable to the cultural anthropologists, because it involved too many unsubstantiated hypotheses about a history for which there was no documents. It was too ambitious. The other characteristic of cultural anthropology was the stress on the subjective nature of experience. For cultural anthropologists, what determined the course of history was culture and this was in the words of one author 'super-organic'. This was because people could only apprehend die world through the arbitrary and specific cultural concepts which they had learnt

from their forebears, and so natural conditions were irrelevant in themselves since they always had to be seen through culture. This idea contradicted evolutionary theories such as those of Morgan, since these assumed that it was the challenge of nature, in its natural form, which explained evolution and therefore history.

American cultural anthropology has its theoretical roots in the Germany of the turn of the century. That is because it was founded by several scientists of German origin, foremost among whom is Franz Boas. The Germany of Boas's formative years was the period of the development of the Social Democratic party under Kautsky and also of the split between the Marxists and the reformists which led to the formation of the 'orthodox' view of Marxist anthropology found in the work of such writers as Plekhanov. Although the particular history of Marxist movements does not seem to have had a direct influence on Boas, the same kinds of influence were at work on him as on the Marxists.

The intellectual history of Boas is usually seen as dominated by his conversion from a natural scientist studying hard facts — physics—to that of a student of cultural, or intellectual facts — cultural anthropology. Geography and psychology, two subjects he also studied, are seen in this perspective as half-way houses in this transformation. Boas's realization of the importance of culture is said to have occurred in the course of a geographical expedition to the Arctic where he intended to study the natural environment in which the Eskimos lived. He was also to study what the Eskimos thought about their environment and how they had adapted to it. In pursuit of this double aim Boas came to the conclusion that the two things were not as simply related as had been assumed. Because of this Boas abandoned his scientist's view of cognition, which .assumed that people simply mirrored natural facts in their ideas and concepts, and instead he adopted a historian's view of culture which implied that ideas and concepts are governed not by the world as it is but that culture is the product of a specific unique process governed by its own independent laws. Boas then went on to argue that since culture existed independently of natural circumstances, cultures could not be ranked as being better or worse adapted to the environment, or more or less technologically advanced, as was implied in evolutionary theories such as those of Spencer or Morgan. For Boas

all cultures were equally valid on their own specific terms, and since they were all irreducible they could not be ranked, as

was done by evolutionary theorists; cultures were simply different and that was all there was to it. This is how the concept of cultural relativism developed, a concept which came to dominate American anthropology, and which states that it is wrong to evaluate one culture in terms of the values or knowledge of another. (See Stocking, 1968, for a discussion of the formation of this theory.)

Although there is no doubt some truth in the story of the crucial importance, for the formation of cultural anthropology, of Boas's trip to the Eskimos, it is also clear, as Stocking shows, that this change was at the same time closely linked to the intellectual climate of Germany during this period. Boas at first held the generally accepted view of German anthropology that there was a direct relationship between geography and culture. This is what had led to his Eskimo field trip in the first place, since the Eskimos seemed to offer an obvious case for demonstrating such a proposition. This position we have already come across in our discussion of the work of Plekhanov who was so influenced by Ratzel and his anthropo-geography. However, not only did Ratzel influence Plekhanov, he was also Boas's teacher. As we saw in the last chapter anthropo-geography was a crudely materialist theory which was to have a harmful effect on Soviet thinking about primitive society. The incorporation of Ratzel's theories, and of the type of materialism they implied, into Marxism was no accident; it was well in keeping with the Darwinist view of evolution which we noted in Marxist thought following Marx's own death. This view tended towards the implication that cognition and knowledge were simply determined by some sort of economic or natural process, the dynamics of which were entirely out of the hands of men. This scientism extended well beyond Marxism as is witnessed by the view of many anthropologists of that time, and Ratzel's theories were only one example. It is this theory and Ratzel's formulation of it which were first accepted by Boas.

Inevitably this type of materialism brought about a reaction. This occurred simultaneously both within Marxism and beyond it. In philosophy the reaction took the form of a revival of some aspect of

Kant's theories. Within Marxism this neo-Kantianism was linked, as we noted above, to reformism. Outside Marxism one of its products was cultural anthropology. Boas was strongly influenced by neo-Kantianism in his university environment and

this seems to have been one of the factors which led him to stress how human cognition and morals could not be explained simply as a solution to natural and material problems. Following Kant, Boas stressed that cognition preceded experience since it organized it. However, for Boas, and unlike Kant, cognition came from culture. It is significant that, while in the Arctic, Boas spent much time reading Kant. It is not surprising that the stress on culture as a determinant of consciousness seems to have been one way of handling Kant's criticism of the empiricist view of knowledge and morals, a view which was implied in anthropo-geography. This revival of Kant has had much to do with the origin of American cultural anthropology and, intriguingly, it relates American anthropology to Marx in as much as Kant had a strong influence on Marx, and, also, the revival of Kantianism at the beginning of the century greatly affected early Marxism and Marxist anthropology. However, the connection did not last and American cultural anthropologists seem to have rapidly retreated from such fundamental philosophical considerations.

Another formative influence on American cultural anthropology, but one which is even less directly linked to the history of Marxism, is the belief in the uniqueness and wholeness of different cultures, a uniqueness which gives them a 'spirit' which endures and is largely unaffected by material circumstances. This mystical view of nationality, which goes back to German romantics such as Herder, was particularly significant in the work of another of Boas's teachers, Bastian, and was passed on to American anthropology in the concept of culture as a complete, permanent, and self-contained cognitive and ethical whole. This is a view which was later developed by two of Boas's pupils, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. This romantic view of culture has had little influence on Marxism, but even this is not completely unrelated to the currents of thought we have looked at, since in an earlier form it was influential on some writers, which led Engels to stress the unique eternal purity of peasant communities

in Germany and Eastern Europe, a view which, as we have seen, was also held by the Narodniks.

These then are the intellectual roots of American anthropology and it is not surprising that such a cultural anthropology came into conflict with the evolutionary theories which had previously held sway in America. After a difficult period, culturaTanthropo-logy won over evolutionary anthropology and until the 1950s it

almost totally dominated the American anthropological scene. This success was helped by the fact that cultural anthropology was seen in a variety of ways as legitimizing the American way of life (see, for example, Kluckholm, 1948). It was seen as compatible with liberal economics since its stress on irreducible cultural differences was given as a validation of allowing people to be free from state interference. Cultural anthropology was seen as a theory which recognized cultural differences but ruled out the possiblity that one culture was better than another, and as a result it was seen as well suited to the multi-ethnic United States.

If cultural anthropology was all-American, evolutionism, on the other hand, became associated by the Americans with communism, in part because of Soviet enthusiasm for it. The significance of the connection between evolutionary theory and communism for academic politics is well illustrated by the case of the lonely supporter of Morgan's evolutionary theories during the period 1918-1950, Leslie White.

Leslie White had from the Thirties maintained a theory of evolution which sees mankind going through stages fairly similar to those set out by Morgan and Tylor, although he had also made several important modifications to their scheme. For example, he rejected the absence of monogamy and the family for early stages of mankind. He also, like the British archaeologist, Gordon Childe, laid much greater stress on the significance of the domestication of plants and animals than Morgan ever did. The main difference, however, between White's theories and those of the earlier evolutionist, was his much more systematic technological determinism. White believed that different societies should be seen in terms of their technological efficiency: the amount of energy harnessed per individual. This gives a ranking of societies on

a quantifiable basis and this ranking has evolutionary significance in that, according to White, the higher always replaces the lower, either through evolutionary transformation or because societies with higher efficiency will vanquish those with lower efficiency. Clearly this theory is similar to the very simple views of causation thought to be applicable to pre-class societies by some of the Soviet anthropologists, although White goes much further than they do by also applying it to class societies. It is very difficult to see in what sense this is a Marxist point of view except in this similarity.

White, however, was influenced in the formation of his theory

by contact with Soviet anthropologists, although they, for their part, almost unanimously rejected his position. For example, in a peculiarly dogmatic article, the Soviet anthropologist Artanovskii (1964) not only rejects White's politics but also points out how this simple materialism was unacceptable to Marx and Lenin: 'In comparing human society with a flight of wild ducks, White ignores the fact that human society, unlike the "society" of wild ducks, has a history hammered out in the difficult struggle to subject nature to its power and for a certain period, in class conflict.' (P. 25.) In spite of this Soviet rejection, during the Second World War Leslie White was seen by many American anthropologists as a dangerous subversive because of his earlier contact with Soviet anthropologists and because he was a lonely champion of Morgan's work, which by then had become completely associated in American eyes with Marxism. White's academic enemies used this link with Soviet ideas to try to undermine his reputation. M. Opler wrote of his work: 'It is curious that our neo-evolutionists (meaning White and his students) constantly acknowledge their debt to Darwin, Tylor, and Morgan and never have a word to say about the relation of their ideas to those of Marx, Engels, Bukharin, Plekhanov, Labriola, Suvorov, Lenin, Stalin, *et. al.'* He finished darkly, 'anthropologists might well take a closer look at recent intellectual history and at some recent trends in American ethnology.' (Quoted in Harris, 1968:639.)

Partly as a result of such attacks White was for a long time isolated, and his evolutionism and theory of historical causation was ignored. From the 1960s onwards, however, his influence began to grow again

and to combine with that of another American anthropologist, J. Stewart, whom he nevertheless regarded as a fundamental opponent. While Steward stresses the multiplicity and diversity of evolutionary lines. White stresses the unitary character of evolution.

Steward was a pupil of Boas but he differed from Boas in that from the 1940s he began to stress the significance of the natural environment for social systems and to see the evolution of societies as a continuing adaptation to geography. This theory was largely developed in Stewart's work on the development of South American cultures such as the Inca. He argued that the development of the Inca state paralleled the development of such cultures as Egypt, because the same environment had led to

similar technological innovations, in this case irrigation, which had then made possible similar political, social, and religious institutions. This theory owed much to Wittfogel and his views on the Asiatic mode of production; none the less Stewart remained always to a certain extent critical of the notion of oriental despotism (Mintz, 1979). The link to Wittfogel is the only possibly Marxist element in Stewart's development. Even stressing this tenuous link is misleading since what interested Stewart in Wittfogel were those aspects which were introduced into Marxism mainly from the theories of anthropologists, and never genuinely integrated.

Stewart's influence was particularly important in that it was to be developed by an influential group of American anthropologists who combined his theories with those of White to form a distinct contemporary school of American anthropology which has come to be known as 'cultural ecology'. These anthropologists take a general evolutionary view which does not imply any particular line of development. They stress that there are many different lines of evolution but at the same time that these different lines are governed by the same principle: adaptation to a given geographical environment in terms of available technology. What characterizes these writers is the belief that institutions are explicable in terms of their adaptive fitness to the environment, given the available technology. In this way the cultural ecologist will explain the tendency to continual feuding in certain social systems as an adaptation to over-population, or they

will explain the practice of animal sacrifice as a device for regulating the relative supply of meat and vegetables. Central to their theory is the idea of a direct causal link between environmental needs and institutions. For example, according to them, when population rises to a certain level the State will be invented, because it then becomes necessary to ensure an adequate food supply. This theory could be, and has been, interpreted as an illustration of such remarks by Marx and Engels as 'The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.' (The German *Ideology,* 42.) It is not surprising, therefore, that the most theoretically explicit member of this school, Marvin Harris, has claimed that cultural ecology, or at least his version of it, is in some sense Marxist.

Marvin Harris's argument was elaborated in an influential history of anthropology entitled The Rise *of* Anthropological

Theory, published in 1968, and has been restated and emphasized in a more recent book called *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture,* (1979). Harris's cultural materialism is seen by its creator as being a form of Marxism with certain modifications. First of all cultural materialism has no political implications. It is purely a scientific theory which according to Harris can be evaluated by straightforward scientific notions of proof. Secondly, Harris rejects the notion of dialectic, which he sees as an unfortunate accretion picked up by Marx from Hegel: 'the Hegelian monkey' is the term he uses to describe it. In practice Harris also rejects any dogmatic attachment to the specific evolutionary schemes of Marx and Engels, and like Stewart he stresses the multilinearity of evolution. Although he rightly sees Marx as also having a similar multilinear view of evolution, there can be no doubt that he goes much further in that direction than Marx had ever envisaged. Harris contrasts his position with, on the one hand, the Boasian historical particularist school of the cultural anthropologists, whom he sees as refusing the challenge of looking for laws governing history, and on the other, orthodox Marxists whom he sees as both dogmatic and somehow overly subtle because of their introduction of dialectics. This excess of subtlety is for Harris the mark of two other groups which he calls 'eclectics' and 'structural Marxists'. These two categories refer to those Marxist anthropologists, mainly French, who have been influenced by the work of Althusser, Suret-

Canale, and Godelier, and who will be discussed in the next chapter. Harris complains that these people produce theories which are too complicated and which obscure the pristine simplicity of cultural materialism.

The first aspect of Marxism which Harris rejects - its political aspect-is very strange, since his history of anthropology, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory,* is a determined attempt to show the political implications and motivations of all the works of previous anthropologists. Harris does this with an enthusiasm which involves casting doubts on motives of individual people in a way which is reminiscent of a witch hunt and at which many Marxists would baulk. He also demonstrates very well, however, that the very enterprise of studying man is always a political exercise, and that anthropology has always either challenged or legitimized the society in which it occurs. One would have thought that this attitude would lead Harris to see Marx's insistence on

the unity of theory and practice, which he rejects, as the recognition of an inevitable fact. Anthropologists, as other scientists, either consciously or not, are taking sides in politics, and an attempt to ignore this usually involves passively supporting the dominant class. Of course Harris is right that the recognition of this fact is no excuse for ignoring or falsifying evidence, and he is also right that this has often been done, just as much by the Right as the Left. However, even if we accept these two important points, this in no way modifies the inevitable political character of scientific enterprise, which Harris demonstrates but which he seems to think he can avoid.

The second aspect of Marxism which Harris rejects is what he calls 'dialectics' and the implications of this rejection are more important, as it shows well the theoretical character of his cultural materialism. The term 'dialectics' has been used in a variety of ways by Marxists but it always involves describing the complexity of the historical process in class society as seen by Marx. In particular it has been used to characterize the interaction between economic forces and peoples' ideas and values. Marx sees these ideas and values as ultimately produced in the complex interactions of history, in the contradictions between systems and the logical development of ideas and material

facts, which he outlined in the *Preface to* a Critique of *Political Economy.* In particular Marx stresses that, unlike animals, men are conscious of their existence, that they live in a historically constructed system, and make their history through their conscious actions. Because of this, history is for Marx 'dialectical' and there can be no direct relation between economic base and representation. This was the basis of Marx's rejection of the mechanistic materialism of such writers as d'Holbach, la Mettrie, Helvetius, and Malthus, a rejection which is based on Hegel's reworking of some of Kant's criticisms of this tradition. Although there has always been a tendency among some Marxists to succumb to the scientism of Darwinists and their heirs, and thereby to forget about dialectics, this tendency has always been severely limited. The tendency was not absent in the later Engels and became dominant in Kautsky, a point stressed by Lenin. On the whole, however, Marxists only considered primitive societies as pre-dialectical because they regarded these as pre-class; this was the case for Plekhanov who otherwise was very conscious of the essential part of dialectics in any form of Marxism.

Harris, by throwing out the notion of dialectics makes this tendency, which has by and large been kept peripheral to Marxism, central. Indeed this modification is quite ironic when we remember how this technological determinism had come into Marxism. It had come in as a result of the merging of the rhetorical and historical uses of anthropology, which had left Engels in The Origin with no social theory for handling primitive society, since these were for him pre-class. Engels has therefore turned to an alternative theory for these societies and he and his successors had looked to anthropologists-Morgan, Tylor, and Ratzel - to supply such a theory for primitive societies. The theory which came in then was the theory which Marx had rejected, at least for class societies, and was only another form of the prevalent Darwinism of the turn of the century. When Harris therefore sees this theory as true Marxism he in fact is only recognizing in Marxism, a, to him familiar, older, anthropological theory which had been kept alive by White and which had formed his own views, but which was only linked to Marxism almost accidently. Harris's Marxism is totally irrelevant in that what he praises in Marxism is only nineteenth-century Darwinian anthropology. He in fact simply extends to all

societies Plekhanov's views about causation in pre-class societies, views borrowed from anthropology in the first place.

The result is a theory where human institutions and concepts are seen as direct results of natural circumstances. Harris's favourite example is that of the sacred cow in India. He argues that the reason why Indians refuse to kill cows is not because of the theological reasons they delude themselves with, but because this is the most efficient way of dealing with cows in a society where they are valuable as milk-givers, dung-givers (for fertiliser), and as draught animals. The explanation of people's beliefs and values is to be found *directly* in the nature of the techno-environmental combination.

There are a whole host of objections to this type of explanation which have been discussed in anthropology in relation to similar theories, objections which had been foreshadowed by Marx. The first objection is the *ad* hoc nature of the explanation. Harris notes that cows are holy in India and then looks around for anything that will show the belief to be reasonable in terms of the economy; he does not specify a general theory of what kind of conditions will cause cows to be considered holy. Since he does

not do this, his theory cannot be challenged by the numerous cases where similar conditions to those he notes for India occur but where the cow is not held holy. In this way his theory protects itself from challenge but also from the ability to say anything but the obvious. An instant of thought will show that an 'explanation' of this sort could be given for any and every phenomenon. Supposing that the Indians abhorred the cow and would not allow it in their country; it would be just as easy for Harris to explain the custom by saying that this abhorrence was due to the fact that if the Hindus allowed cows to wander about the place they would ravage crops and bring disease, two things which Indian cows undoubtedly do. This point has repeatedly been made in criticism of Harris but he and his collaborators simply ignore it. More interestingly, Harris's theory fails for precisely the reason which Kant, Hegel, and Marx had given for rejecting this type of mechanical materialism. The point is put simply by Marx when he refers to the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham who held views in many ways similar to those of Harris: 'To know what is useful for a dog,

we must study dog nature. This nature cannot be excogitated from the "principle of utility". Applying the same consideration to man, he that would pass judgement upon all human activities, movements, relations, etc. in accordance with the principle of utility, must first become acquainted with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch.' (Capital, 671, vol. 2.) Men do not live directly in the world as apprehended by the scientist but in the world as seen through their consciousness. This consciousness is the product of history and therefore no simple general explanation can be given for what men do, since such an explanation inevitably ignores the significance of their consciousness and hence history. What Harris means by materialism is that the ideas by which men live have no importance for their action. Rather their actions are some direct result of physical forces in their environment. Ironically Harris quotes with approval Marx's famous statement in the *Preface to the Critique of PoUtical Economy:* 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence which determines their consciousness,' (Harris, 1968:229), which he takes to mean that somehow the material conditions of production directly determine consciousness. In doing this he not only chooses to forget about dialectics, as he tells us proudly, but he

also fails to notice the key word 'social' in Marx's original. A word which makes it quite clear that Marx is not in any way thinking of the kind of determinism Harris has in mind where it is simply the environment which determines culture.

Without politics, without dialectics, without a consideration of consciousness, without an acceptance of any aspects of Marx's evolutionary sequence, one can only conclude that there is nothing in Harris which is particularly Marxist, in spite of his claims. Rather Harris's intellectual lineage is, as he partly realizes, to the materialists of the eighteenth century, such as d'Holbach, who themselves were intellectual heirs of the seventeenth-century neo-Spinozans.

The significance of Harris's claim to be a Marxist, however is important in terms of present debates because his work has misleadingly become for many American anthropologists what Marxism is. As a

result several influential writers in the United States phrase their criticisms of Harris as though they were criticisms of Marxism.

One case in point is the recent work of a leading American anthropologist, M. Sahlins, whose book. Culture and *Practical Reason,* is presented as a general criticism of Marxist approaches, though it is in fact only justifiably applicable to the views of writers such as Marvin Harris. Sahlin's book is an attack on the view that natural circumstances plus technology can explain culture or that culture is a system created in order to organize the production of the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, etc. Instead Sahlins argues that it is the process of production which is determined by the culture of the society, since this both dictates what people want to produce and how they set about it. The point is a simple one which we have already come across in this book. It is that people act in terms of how they see the world, not in terms of how die world is seen by an external scientist. The way people see the world develops in terms of the complex history of society, but does not reflect reality, and indeed may be totally misleading of that reality. For example, labour, as we have seen, is represented in capitalism as though it were a thing having existence separate from that of the worker. This representation is the product of history and will affect future history, in that people will act in the world, not in terms of what it actually is like, but in terms of what they see it as being like. Because of this, culture, people's consciousness, to use Marx's

term, will never be directly caused by practical necessity. This criticism is a valid criticism of eighteenth-century philosophers such as Helvetius and Bentham but not of Marx, since he stressed above all the *historical* nature and misleading character of capitalist formulations of such basic concepts as labour, property, money, law, etc.

Sahlins is aware of this and he gives a good and valuable account of Marx's view about the historically determined nature of cognition. None the less Sahlins argues that there is 'another' Marx, a crude materialist Marx, which falls under his strictures. Evidence for this 'other' Marx comes from two main sources. The first is passages from The German Ideology where Marx stresses that concepts have a natural origin. For example, Sahlins quotes the famous remark: 'life is not determined by

consciousness, but consciousness by life,' (Sahlins, 1976:136) as though this demonstrated that Marx believed, like Harris, that consciousness is a mere epiphenomenon of natural circumstances. This view of what Marx says could only be understood by ignoring the context (also quoted by Sahlins) of this and similar remarks. Marx and Engels in this quotation are contrasting their position with that of such writers as Hegel who had argued that man's ideas come from a supernatural mysterious source. By contrast, Marx and Engels in The German *Ideology* argue, as everywhere else, that consciousness is the product of the history of man evolving in natural circumstances, in other words that consciousness has a natural origin. They then go on to argue that consciousness is real for men and that therefore, although it evolves as part of the natural (not supernatural) process of history, it forms the way actions take place in terms of the conditions of existence. For Marx, as we saw, men make their history and they do this in terms of their consciousness. This is just the point Sahlins labours to make throughout his book. On the other hand, Sahlins does not believe that ideas and concepts have extranatural origins any more than Marx and Engels did, and so it is not at all clear what Sahlins really finds to object to in the quotation.

The second type of evidence which Sahlins gives for the existence of the 'other Marx' is the fact that Marx in many places uses such phrases as 'what labour really is' - that is, part of life in contrast to its cultural form under capitalism. This is what I referred to as the rhetorical use of anthropology. Marx uses such phrases, as Sahlins is well aware, to show up the peculiarly

historical nature (i.e. cultural nature) of the basic concepts of capitalism, by reference to a largely imaginary pre-capitalist system. Sahlins, however, says that this idea means that Marx is arguing that there is something else, more real than the temporary representation of phenomena in particular historical formulations. For Sahlins, Marx does not take culture seriously enough and fails to realize that cognition is always bound by culture. This is clearly not always so; all of Marx's work is a demonstration of how people act in terms of systems created by history, and there is no difference between them here. If, however, Sahlins rejects that there is any other reality in the processes of history than the image people in a particular culture at a particular time have of

them, then he really is in fundamental disagreement with Marx, as Marx quite clearly believes, as most of us do, that we live in a world that exists beyond any particular representation and that we can penetrate beyond our own culture by theoretical effort. Perhaps Sahlins does not believe that this is possible, but then it is not any more a case of there being two different Marxes, since Marx is quite consistent on this point, but a case of there being two different Sahlinses. One who believes that there is a reality beyond concepts, as implied by most of his other work, and another who, like the Irish philosopher Bishop Berkeley, believes that there is not This is a position which denies the possibility of anthropology, since in such a case we could never understand people with other cultures than our own, since we would share nothing in common with them.

In fact the matter is much simpler. Sahlins, in *Culture and* Practical Reason, has offered a critique of the view of writers such as Harris and Malinowski {see below) which is quite valid, if not new, but he has tried to turn it into a criticism of Marxism. This is because the views of such writers as Harris are, as noted above, often wrongly equated with Marxism in the USA.

Ironically, there is a way in which Sahlins's view, like Harris's for that matter, is fundamentally anti-Marxist, although he nowhere discusses it. Marx's starting-point is a realization of the futility of the old philosophical discussions about idealism and materialism, and a substitution for these of a discussion of real history and real society. Sahlins seems to return wilfully to the eighteenth-century discussions which Marx bypassed, as though these were at the core of Marxism. In this way, Sahlins denies the value of anthropology for understanding man, a value which

Marx demonstrated dramatically. The renewal of these old debates by professional anthropologists seems odd.

Apart from the development of cultural ecology into cultural materialism under the impetus of Harris and the criticism of Sahlins, there is also a completely different Way in which the pupils of White and Steward have been influenced by Marxism.

Most of the work we have considered so far deals with Marxist views about pre-capitalist societies, and many of the problems we have looked at spring from the fact that Marxists have developed their theories principally for dealing with capitalism, and have dealt with other societies as a somewhat poorly elaborated afterthought. This restriction in a book on Marxism and anthropology is justified because until the last war, and also more recently, anthropologists, whether from the East or the West, believed that because their studies concerned primitive and peasant communities they could safely ignore capitalism itself. Even studies of peasant societies by such American anthropologists as Robert Redfield among others, stressed the difference and separation of peasants and their 'folk culture' from the concerns of the towns and of the State. Little by little, however, this position has become untenable under the impact of political events such as the Chinese Revolution and the growth of peasant movements all over the world which clearly showed the involvement of rural areas in wider socio-economic structures. The exclusion of the consideration of the dynamics of a wider context in peasant studies has come under challenge in the work of many anthropologists.

Among the first anthropologists who questioned the suitability of studying peasant communities in isolation from the capitalist social system in which they were embedded were, as well as Marvin Harris himself in earlier works, two pupils of Julian Stewart: E. Wolf and S. Mintz. What distinguishes their work is that, instead of ignoring the significance of the relation of local communities of peasants and their economy to the wider economic systems in which they are embedded, they have, on the contrary, concentrated on this relation, especially on the significance of capitalism for Latin American and Caribbean peasantries. In particular they have looked at class relations both within the peasant communities and beyond them. This has made them refer back to Marxism but this time not to Marxist theories about pre-capitalist systems but to Marxist discussions about the place of the peasantry in capitalist societies.

Marx and Engels, as we have seen, vacillated in their consideration of peasants, but the question was to become central as the possibility of a socialist revolution occurring in a country with a large peasantry became a real possibility. It was Kautsky who first began to consider

seriously the place of peasants in capitalist systems, as well as the related question of the significance of colonialism. However, it was the German Menshevik Rosa Luxemburg who most developed a Marxist theory of these two topics. Luxemburg, and especially Kautsky, were strongly criticized by Lenin in the way that we noted above. By then, the place of the peasantry and imperialism had moved to the forefront of Marxist polemics, and it was to these sources, as well as other non-Marxist sources, that Wolf in particular turned. In a book called Peasant Wars *of the 20th* Century (1971), he in part turns to Lenin's theories about the significance of class divisions within the peasantry, when trying to understand the outbreak of the several peasant revolutions which have characterized this century. Similarly Mintz's discussion of the significance of class for a country such as Puerto Rico is also in part moulded by the framework of Marxist discussions (Mintz, 1974). This is not to say that the work of both these writers does not also manifest many other influences, some of them very remote from Marxism.

In many ways the importance of Mintz's and Wolf's work is that it has been one element in a reawakening among anthropologists all over the world to the fact that apparently isolated communities may actually have been fundamentally moulded by social systems to which they have apparently only superficial and subservient ties. These ties may be those of peasant communities to the nation states in which they find themselves or they may be colonial or neo-colonial ties. It is not surprising that with a new emphasis on these relationships anthropologists have repeatedly turned in recent years to Marxist theories on the peasantry and imperialism. This emphasis should be seen as part of a wider theoretical development which goes well beyond anthropology, but which involves anthropological theories, as they have significance for peoples traditionally studied by anthropologists. Among these are the theories of historians and economists such as Emanuel, Sweezy, Dobb, Hobsbawm, and Wallerstein. This tendency to merge the work of anthropologists with that of other Marxist theorists is probably one of the most important developments in the continuing relation between anthropology and

Marxism. It inevitably takes us beyond the scope of this volume but we shall return to it when considering recent British and French

anthropology. In anthropology in the United States, it remains true that it owes much of its impetus to Wolf and Mintz, in its initial stages at least.

6. Marxism and British and French Anthropology

The two previous chapters considered the significance of Marxism for Soviet and American anthropology; the renewal of interest in Marxism among Western anthropologists has come from totally independent developments, mainly in France. The purpose of this chapter is to explain them and to show how this new Marxist anthropology is different from the ones we have looked at so far.

Before French anthropology, the history of British anthropology must be examined, partly because until recently the British social anthropological tradition was dominant in Western Europe and also because French Marxist anthropology defined itself in part in opposition to the British tradition.

The theoretical origin of the school which came to be known as British social anthropology is dual. It lies in part in the rejection of the evolutionary theories of earlier writers and in part in the acceptance of theories which it sees as derived from the French social thinker Durkheim.

The rejection of the evolutionary theories of such writers as Morgan, Tylor, and others was much less theoretical than the similar rejection on the part of Boas and was mainly associated with Bronislaw Malinowski and his pupils. Malinowski's rejection of evolutionism was principally methodological. He argued that the evolutionary schemes of his predecessors were based on little more than guesswork and could not be properly documented since they concerned pre-literate peoples whose history could never be known. He rejected in particular the idea that there were survivals from earlier periods, because customs have to be practised by the living for some reason. They were not there because they had existed in the past but because they were of use in the present.

This criticism of survivals was part of a more general view of society which was intimately linked with Malinowski's methodological innovation: the type of long-term fieldwork which he called

‘participant observation’. Malinowski lived for long periods with the people of certain oceanic islands, the Trobrianders, and he believed that if one obtained information in this way, primitive societies appeared as living wholes, where every aspect fitted with every other and where all aspects were geared to the tasks necessary for survival. Malinowski ridiculed evolutionist theories in that they failed to understand primitive societies for themselves and failed to see primitives as fellow living human beings with the same sort of desires as anybody else.

It will be clear that Malinowski’s position had, and still has, a very strong appeal and must have been incredibly refreshing. None the less, however much one might sympathize with the spirit of Malinowski’s criticism of evolutionism, it offers no very coherent rejection of evolutionary theories as such. His emphasis on detailed fieldwork could be seen simply as an exhortation to better anthropological data gathering. Indeed it is not clear how far Malinowski himself rejected earlier evolutionary theories. There is no doubt, however, that his new emphasis was seen as such a rejection by his successors and this has characterized British anthropology since his time. Furthermore, the rejection of evolutionism, untheoretical as it was, became, according to these anthropologists, a good reason for ignoring Marxism, since for British anthropologists the association of Marxism with evolutionism, in particular the evolutionism of Morgan, meant that it could be dismissed out of hand. In fact the desperate search for academic respectability by British anthropologists in the period 1920-60 ensured that on the whole they kept well away from dangerous political associations.

The second major influence on British social anthropology was Durkheim. fimile Durkheim, whose work spans the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this one, developed his ideas quite independently of those of the Marxists and of Marx, with which he seems to have been poorly acquainted. The reason lies in the history of socialism in France. In the period until the First World War when Marxist ideas were spreading rapidly elsewhere in continental Europe they had little influence in France because there the socialist stage was filled by the dominating figure of Jean Jaures whose relation with the Marxists remained distant. Jaures’s socialism was largely home grown

and independent, and Durkheim's early close association with Jaures gave his work a character of detachment from Marxism. In

certain respects Durkheim's ideas resemble those of Marx, as, for instance, in his insistence on the social origin of knowledge and religion; while in other respects, as in his insistance on the possibility of avoiding conflict in class societies, his views seem to be the very opposite to those of Marx.

It was only a very diluted and transformed version of Durkheim's work which influenced British anthropology, and this transformation was largely due to the other co-founder of the tradition with Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown.

Radcliffe-Brown's Durkheimianism consisted of an insistence that societies should be seen as organized and integrated social systems, where every institution, belief, and rule played a part in maintaining the reproduction of the whole in the same form through time. The task of the anthropologist was to classify these integrated wholes-these social structures—so that we could learn the range of possibility of such structures. This, combined with the ideas of Malinowski, led to a number of extremely good detailed studies which in many ways have not been equalled in any other anthropological tradition.

The theory which lay at the back of these descriptive studies soon began to be criticized, especially by two pupils of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown: M. Gluckman and E. R. Leach. These criticisms mainly concerned the Radcliffe-Brownian assumption of the existence of well-integrated wholes which were to be the unit of study. Leach, in particular, stressed the fact that the notion of a limited number of 'societies' was totally misleading. He argued that there were no clear boundaries between societies and what boundaries there were were temporary and contextual. This obvious if important point was developed by Leach into a fundamental criticism of Radcliffe-Brown's theories as he argued that since there were no naturally occurring distinct social units, it was quite clearly impossible to assume that within the necessarily arbitrary boundaries set up by anthropologists there existed a *real* coherent organic system, where every part had its role to play in the maintenance of the whole. Pretending that

this type of integration existed was misleading; it hid the complexity and fluidity of the social process. In particular, Leach pointed out that the presumption of a well-ordered, self-reproducing whole left no room for the understanding of social change.

Gluckman's criticisms were similar, and reached a similar conclusion, although, unlike Leach, Gluckman seems never to

have been able to free himself of the very theories he was attacking. Particularly relevant here, however, is the fact that some of Gluckman's theoretical assumptions seem to have been influenced by Marxist ideas, although he never adopted an overall theory that could usefully be described as Marxist.

His main difference from the 'well-ordered whole' notion of British social anthropologists consisted in the fact that, unlike Radcliffe-Brown, Gluckman chose to emphasize conflict. This conflict was not normally seen as class conflict in his work, but it was conflict all the same, and some of his pupils, such as R. Frankenberg, felt that they could reintroduce the idea of class under the general label of conflict. The lead given by such writers as Frankenberg was to be taken up by one or two more recent British anthropologists such as T. Asad who repeatedly pointed out the existence of class structures in societies where the studies of other anthropologists seemed almost to go out of their way to obscure this fact. Asad's point of view in these studies is clearly Marxist, and resembles that of a number of British sociologists, but seems to involve an attempt to apply to peasant societies types of analysis developed for capitalist society, without really coming to grips with the fact that in the end these societies are not fully capitalist and cannot be understood as such (Asad, 1972). A similar criticism could be made of another study, which has been seen as Marxist inspired, by one of Ghiciman's students: Worsley's reanalysis of a traditional study by Fortes of a people in West Africa, the Tallensi. Worsely criticized Fortes for stressing kinship and ignoring the economic interests which he sees as lying behind talk of kinship. The problem, however, with such theories as Worsley's is that, even if we assumed that they were right, they still leave open the question which Marx and Engels had tried to

answer, why in this type of society relations of production are talked about in terms of kinship (Worsley, 1956).

Another aspect of the criticism made by Gluckman, and others associated with him, of the notion of 'social structure' consisted in pointing out that it enabled the anthropologist to close his eyes to the colonial situation in which British anthropologists found most of the societies they studied. This has not been true of all British anthropologists, and such writers as L. Mair and I. Schapera had stressed the significance of the colonial situation; in the case of Schapera, in a very radical fashion. However Gluckman pointed out that by stressing the organic unity of traditional societies it

was possible to forget that the people studied were being used and exploited by systems of much wider geographical extent. Oiunkman first stressed this in an essay on modem Zululand (Gluckman, 1940). The theme was to be developed more fully be P. Worsley in a study of New Guinean millenarian religious movements, The Trumpet *Shall Sound* (1957). This was a work much more clearly influenced by Marxist ideas than anything else previously written in British anthropology, although, significantly these were not the ideas of Marxists concerned with primitive societies. Worsley argued that the religious movements which arise in Oceania should not be seen in isolation but as a direct response to the frustration of the colonial situation. He saw these movements as attempts to explain the power of the colonizers and as last resorts in dealing with this power when political opposition had failed. Worsley's study heralded a growing number of works on the part of anthropologists which considered the colonial situation and its significance in terms influenced by Marxist ideas. The collected essays edited by Asad under the title *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* illustrated this trend and contained severe criticisms of earlier anthropologists for their attitude to colonialism (Asad, 1973).

Asad's book marked a new departure in political self-awareness among British anthropologists, but by and large this phenomenon has only recently taken on a clearly Marxist character. British anthropology in the period of its strength and glory, 1920-60, almost entirely ignored Marxism. This was due in part to political expediency, to its traditional

distaste for self-conscious theory, and to the fact that such theoretical influence as it accepted was non-Marxist. The home-grown theory it had developed became, from the 1950s on, an easy prey to fundamental criticisms such as those of Leach, but although these gained greater and greater acceptance they did not lead in Britain to the formulation of an alternative position. Instead, British anthropologists turned to other countries for new theoretical inspiration, and principally to France, especially to the work of Claude L6vi-Strauss.

The theoretical disarray of British anthropology has not, however, diminished its central strength, which goes back directly to Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. British anthropology is unique for its detailed studies of actual societies in operation, and for relating whole varieties of phenomena to create a synthesis. In a way which is strangely reminiscent of Marx's

entire enterprise, it refuses to separate different sides of the social process, but tries to reveal interconnections in the real life of groups under study. In this it has contrasted with French anthropology, to which we now turn.

French anthropology, which had begun in a small way before, under the influence of Durkheim's pupil, M. Mauss, was totally disrupted by the Second World War. Levi-Strauss's self-appointed task after the war was twofold: he attempted to recreate French anthropology on a practical level, and he introduced a new theory.

L6vi-Strauss's conception of the subject matter of anthropology is similar to that of Boas. He sees anthropology as the study of cultures: systems of meanings by which people see their world. Like Boas, Levi-Strauss is strongly particularist; for him every culture is unique, and he strongly rejects the reductionism implied both in evolutionism and in the classification of systems of social structure in the work of Radcliffe-Brown. However, Levi-Strauss is not a cultural particularist as Boas was, and that is because of the central theoretical significance for his anthropology of an analogy with a certain type of linguistics which dominated America during the war, when he was a resident in the United States: structural linguistics. This theory stated that there are

a number of underlying structures to language. Because of this regularities are not to be explained in terms of the observed systems but in terms of the underlying principles which organized the systems. These underlying regularities, such as binary oppositions, were thought, because they were believed to organize language, to be universals of all human communication, and so Levi-Strauss set out to prove that these universal organizing principles also organize culture, which for him is principally the way people communicate with each other.

There is nothing very Marxist in such a theory. Indeed Levi-Strauss's insistence on the uniqueness of each case would at first sight appear to make his theory incompatible with a generalizing theory such as the Marxist tradition in the Soviet Union. Levi-Strauss, none the less, insists that in part his work is, at least, compatible and even inspired, by Marxism. First he argues that he is dealing with the transformation of culture, a topic not discussed by Marx. His theory leaves open the question what causes these transformations, and this is what had concerned Marx. It is compatible with Marxist ideas in that it deals with an area unexamined in the Marxist system. Secondly, L6vi-Strauss

stresses the fact, to be emphasized later by other writers, that he is similar to Marx in believing that underlying processes of an unconscious nature govern history and that these processes can only be discovered by theoretical analysis. In this way L6vi-Strauss equates what he calls structure with Marx's conception of history as being directed by internal contradictions in analytically constructed modes of production. (Levi-Strauss, 1966.)

In spite of this 'Marxism' the main effect of Levi-Strauss's work until the 1960s had been to exclude Marxism from French anthropology. His stress on the uniqueness of all cultures seemed to go against any attempt to produce a general theory of history, such as the Marxist one. Indeed in some places Levi-Strauss denies that a general predictive theory of history is ever possible (G. Levi-Strauss, M. Auge, and M. Godelier, 1976). His influence until the 1960s was neither anti-Marxist nor Marxist and this was therefore true of most of French anthropology.

This lack of importance of Marxism for anthropology in France was somewhat odd. French anthropologists, like other French intellectuals, have always counted in their numbers some communists, and partly because of this fact and partly because of the influence of other sciences, Marxist ideas always remained present on the periphery of French anthropology. As a result, during the period immediately following the war until the early 1960s, Marxism did nevertheless influence some few anthropologists. These usually dealt with rather limited topics often linked to the study of the development of technology, as in the case of such writers as G. Haudricourt, who concerned himself with linguistics and technology, and J. Barrau, who dealt with folk views concerning plants and animals. They none the less saw their work as encompassed by Marxist ideas.

In part the reluctance of French Marxist anthropologists before 1960 to integrate their politics with their anthropology was due to an obvious discomfort with the hardening orthodoxy which had developed in the Soviet Union after the Thirties. Only some writers, such as, for example, P. Boiteau, who was not a professional anthropologist, took the whole five stages scheme over, as in a historical work concerning Madagascar which he wrote during that period. As a result he painfully tried to force his extensive knowledge of pre-cblonial Madagascar within the accepted framework of ‘feudalism’, although it clearly did not fit (Boiteau, 1958).

Boiteau’s work explains well why French anthropologists,

strongly influenced by L6vi-Strauss, were reluctant to accept the orthodox pattern. During this period Levi-Strauss, and indeed other anthropologists, were becoming more and more fascinated with the variety and richness of foreign cultures, especially precapitalist cultures, and this manifested itself in their growing self-assurance in attacking the reductionism of British anthropologists. Marxism appeared to them as a theory which was even more reductionist than Radcliffe-Brown’s and which attempted to push many and various totally different structures within the limited framework of European history; a framework which had been transformed by orthodox Marxism into a pseudo universal history.

Boiteau's work on the traditional society of Madagascar shows well what repelled anthropologists in Marxism, but other aspects of his work foreshadowed an area of interest which was to come to the fore in French anthropology much later. His study of Madagascar integrates work on the pre-colonial situation with the colonial situation, showing how one type of society leads to another and how earlier forms of exploitation facilitate the development of later ones. His work demonstrates the same refusal to ignore the political implications of studies of colonized people, the same historical concern with demonstrating actual social transformations in Marxist terms, and the same emphasis on the effect of colonial policy on the peoples studied which has since characterized more modern French Marxist anthropology.

Apart from work such as that of Boiteau, French anthropologists avoided Marxism for the period immediately after the war. However, political events in the 1960s, such as the wars in Algeria and in Vietnam, strongly rekindled left-wing feeling in France in general. Since many French anthropologists were in any case Marxist in their political affiliations, this atmosphere made them all the more eager to reintroduce Marxism into their study, as an answer to the political challenge which was forming outside of their discipline.

It was only after the de-Stalinization period in the USSR that this became possible. French Marxists, who were then almost exclusively members of the French Communist party, suddenly felt able to genuinely combine Marxism and the anthropology they knew by means of a radical criticism of the previous, discredited Soviet orthodoxy. This criticism first took the form of a demonstration that the societies studied by anthropologists, especially traditional African societies, did not fit into the five stages of the Soviet scheme. Predictably this criticism first took

the form of an attempt to revive the concept of the Asiatic mode of production. This was because Marx's intermittent use of the concept offered the opportunity to criticize the specific Soviet reading of Marxism without seeming to be breaking away from Marx.

The first such attempt was made by a leading French communist, J. Suret-Canale, who argued that African states which had been extensively studied by French anthropologists and which seemed quite unlike anything that had ever been known in Europe, were a variant on the Asiatic mode of production. African states, he demonstrated, were not based on the exploitation of slaves or serfs by means of rent, but were, like Asiatic states, based on the exploitation of whole undivided communities. These communities, in spite of their external relation to the dominant group which controlled the State, retained none the less their internal communal organization by and large intact (Suret-Canale, 1964). The influence of Suret-Canale's work was dramatic. By arguing, as he and some of his followers did, for what became known as the 'African mode of production' he began a process of liberation from the five stages. Suret-Canale argued strongly against the Eurocentrism of the older scheme and defined the task of Marxist anthropology not as the elaboration of Engels's scheme but as revising the older scheme in terms of the new knowledge that was being gained from professional anthropology concerning non-European societies. It was not any more a matter of confirming the conclusions of the classical Marxists but of continuing their work in the light of new evidence. This redefinition is the source of all recent developments in French Marxist anthropology and originated in Suret-Canale's work on Africa.

The next step in the creation of the new school was the partial bringing together of the main stream of French anthropology under the leadership of L&vi-Strauss and this new Marxist approach. This development can be traced very largely to a conference in Paris in the 1960s which re-examined the whole notion of the Asiatic mode of production. Following Suret-Canale's lead, the conference pointed out both the need for such a concept, in particular, and in general the need for a complete revision of Marxist views of anthropology in order to incorporate information which had not been available to Marx and Morgan, and to build new theories in the light of this new information.

This general attitude was expressed particularly forcefully by

M. Godelier, a scholar who had been strongly influenced by Levi-Strauss's theories. His contribution to this conference, which has been

translated into English (Godelier, 1978), stresses the point, already implicit in Suret-Canale's work, that a unilinealist view of history is not only untenable but in fact was never held by Marx. He shows this by stressing the continuing significance for the founders of Marxism of the notion of the Asiatic mode of production. Godelier also goes much further and spells out the task of Marxist anthropology particularly forcefully. It is not a matter of going back to the work of the founders of Marxism—some of their ideas, according to Godelier, were dead and false —but of going forward to build up new Marxist theories of pre-capitalist societies on the basis of new knowledge and theories. In particular, Godelier stresses the limited character of Marx's and Engels's view of the history of pre-capitalist society, limited as it was by the fact that their outlook was too much bound by Europe (Godelier, 1978).

The impact of this article was very great on the many anthropologists who considered themselves Marxist but who felt uncomfortable about accepting the five stages or unilinealism. This effect was, as we have seen, even felt by Soviet and other Eastern European anthropologists. It broadened the Marxist notion of evolution so that it might be seen to encompass other lines than the orthodox one, without rejecting a basic Marxist framework. It also implied that Soviet Marxist anthropology was in contradiction with Marx's ideas. This indeed was revolutionary.

In France the effect of Godelier's work, together with that of Suret-Canale and several others, led to the almost total abandonment by Marxists of any finite list of 'modes of production' or stages, irrespective of the historical question about whether such a list could be drawn up from an examination of the work of Marx. Terray makes the point most clearly in a book, which followed soon after the conference on the Asiatic mode of production, entitled in English Marxism and Primitive Society. Terray bluntly says of Morgan's evolutionary sequence, which had been, as we saw, totally incorporated in official Marxist anthropology, that it should be relegated to the 'anthropological Museum'. Only once this is done can the task of Marxist anthropology begin. Terray is fairly representative of French Marxist anthropologists when, in a later article, he makes the

point even more clearly (Terray, 1977). Not only does he reject the notion of the five stages of the five modes of production, but he argues that any attempt at this type of classification is misleading. According to him any such attempt prejudges our knowledge of different societies; it forces us to squeeze marginal instances into one category or another and to use labels which hide a whole range of different phenomena. 'In my view this kind of definition [of mode of productions as a form of classification] is from the point of view of research both unnecessary and harmful. What we need is not a system of classification but an analytical tool, in other words a precise and rigorous definition which will enable us to state clearly the elements we use in the intellectual process of constructing a mode of production from the concrete and real phenomena under examination.' (Terray 1977:136, my translation.) This statement by Terray shows clearly how different French Marxist anthropology had by then become from what had before gone under the name of Marxism.

Before we examine in full the implications of this position we must, however, return to another aspect of Godelier's article on the Asiatic mode of production. As we saw, until 1968 or thereabouts, Marxism and anthropology, which in France very largely meant the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, had ignored each other. Godelier attempted to bring them together, a task he believed was possible after the rejection of the five stages. This point is made most explicitly in another article of his which was also to have great influence, 'Structure and Contradiction in Capital' (1966). The basis of Godelier's argument is that, apart from the obvious differences, there is also a fundamental similarity between the work of L6vi-Strauss and that of Marx.

Godelier takes his cue from some remarks by L6vi-Strauss suggesting this possible rapprochement. He points out that Marx explains capital in terms of the logic of underlying structures which transform themselves partly in terms of changes in such things as technology and the relations of production but also in terms of the internal logic of the way the social system is perceived by those who operate it. This, Godelier argues, is similar to L6vi-Strauss's view of structure, and so it becomes possible to bring the two together. This conclusion seems to me to be true but also rather insignificant since what Godelier sees

as shared by Levi-Strauss and Marx is also shared with many others, if not with most social thinkers. None the less the influence

of his article has been very great both in France and beyond. This is because it has made Marxism respectable for anthropologists and given them the opportunity to make use of Marxist theory without, for that matter, renouncing what they had learnt elsewhere. Similarly it made it respectable for Marxists to dabble with evidence from anthropology which they would otherwise have ignored and with theories which they would not have considered. It is therefore possible to see this article as having had a major stimulating effect on both Marxism and anthropology, even if we consider its actual content not very significant in itself. The article, with others of Godelier's papers, stimulated in the late 1^60s and 1970s an atmosphere of enthusiasm which led to many important and original studies.

This development, however, owed as much, if not more, to the relatively distinct influence of the French Marxist philosopher, L. Althusser. The remarks from Terray's 1977 article quoted above ended in the following way: 'What we need is not a system of classification but an analytical tool, in other words, a precise and rigorous definition which will enable us to state clearly the elements we use in the intellectual process of constructing a mode of production from the concrete and real phenomena under examination.' It was for this task that many French anthropologists turned to Althusser, and to others closely associated with him, as he seemed to offer a clear statement how a 'mode of production' could be constructed as an analytical tool free from the specific cases for which it had been outlined by Marx.

What happened was that Marxist anthropologists, having decided that they could not use Marx's and Engels's work on precapitalist societies for the analysis of these societies, had to turn elsewhere in Marx's work for a model. Naturally they turned to Marx's main work Capital. However, in *Capital* they found the general theoretical approach inevitably tied to the specific mode of production, capitalism, which was mainly under examination. Marxist anthropology required as a preliminary the separation of the general theory from the specific case so that the theory could be used to analyse non-capitalist systems. It is precisely this separation which the work of Althusser had attempted.

Althusser's contribution to Marxist theory is many-faceted and complex, and has been widely discussed, and so only those aspects of his work relevant to the development of anthropology can be considered here, and even then only in a cursory fashion.

The central point of Althusser's work is the interpretation he gives to *Capital,* an interpretation which he feels is justified by stressing the difference between the earlier works of Marx, for example, The German *Ideology,* and the later works, especially *Capital* and the *Preface to the* Introduction *of the Critique of Political* Economy. In these earlier works Marx was still trying to base his social theory, either on the consciousness of individuals, or on historical and evolutionary sequences of the type found in the 'natural histories' of society by eighteenth-century writers. In the later works, Althusser argues, causation is seen quite differently and this is what marks this mature work off from other theories in the social sciences, either before or since. Causation or determination in *Capital* is characterized by the term 'structural causality'. This is what Althusser sees as the general theory of modes of production which lies at the back of the specific study of capitalism.

Althusser sees Marx arguing in *Capital* that the surface of things, by which I believe he means the actors' conceptualization of their social system, is misleading. *Capital* shows how the idea of money, of value, or of labour which people hold obscures the true nature of capitalism, which is the exploitation of the workers by the capitalist. The analyst who, like the traditional economists, tries to understand capitalism in terms of the ideas dominant in the societies based on capitalism, that is in terms of labour, money, capital, etc., is actually caught within the system and cannot therefore grasp its inner working; in the end he simply produces an apology for what he had set out to criticize. Understanding a system without penetrating beyond the way it represents itself is 'empiricism' for Althusser, and it is not analysis but apology. Penetrating the system is not, however, a matter simply of dismissing certain ideas held by the actors and replacing them by another easily apprehended 'level'. That is what Worsley does when he argues that kinship is 'false consciousness' which hides the underlying techno-economic co-operation; or what Harris does when he argues that the belief in sacred cows is an elaborate disguise for maintaining

ecological balance. This substitution of one type of phenomenon for another Althusser equally rejects because it ignores the reality of the social system and the beliefs which form a part of it. This is, to use Marx's term, 'vulgar materialism'. It would amount to saying that concepts such as capital, labour, or property, as defined by capitalism, had

no implications for organizeing labour, extracting a surplus from the workers, or even explaining why certain techniques are used and not others, all of which tasks these concepts, according to Marx, certainly have done. Marx's discovery, according to Althusser, is not this type of reductionism but rather a discovery of the internal mechanisms of capitalism which he reconstructed theoretically, and a discovery of how these theoretical mechanisms produce the surface phenomena which include people's concepts, their technology, and their 'economy' (as understood by classical economists].

The structural causality and this internal mechanism Marx called the mode of production. Thus the capitalist mode of production which Marx 'constructs' is not the capitalism which exists. It would be nonsense for the theoretician to construct what has happened; rather, it is a set of logically connected relations which explain the inner link between various surface phenomena. This capitalist mode of production is the relationship which Marx shows to exist between, among other things, the class relations of capitalism, the way nature is exploited, the technology employed, the political systems, and the conceptual systems. It is this system of *interrelationships* which determines the course of history.

Actually the matter is even more complex for Althusser. A mode of production is a structure made of several interlinked structures, because the systems of concepts is itself a structure as well as, for example, the technology. These systems are, however, subordinated to the key element, the structure of the relations of production, in the case of capitalism the relation of capitalists to workers. A mode of production for Althusser is therefore the construction of a system of internally 'articulated' structures working on each other but not all having the same power. By 'articulation' Althusser means a type of connection where what is joined does not consequently form a whole. The

articulated elements remain fundamentally unchanged as if ready to detach themselves. The notion of articulation therefore stresses the idea of several elements whose different natures will lead to contradiction and therefore revolutionary change.

The example Althusser always goes back to is the theory, repeatedly referred to in this book, and set out in its simplest form by Marx in the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy,* concerning the link between the relations of production and the forces of production. Both the relations of production and the

forces of production can be thought of as systems or structures. Both are linked, yet both develop, to a certain extent, independently, because of their separate character and even because the link between them causes this differential development. For example, the historical development of the relation of production in capitalism leads to a system ever more concerned with exploitation, and this is so to the extent that it ceases to operate the material system of production which involves the forces of production. It is this kind of articulation between systems and the contradictions to which this relation leads, which is seen as the characteristic of Marx's mature analysis of modes of production. As a result anthropologists who use Althusser's work try to construct a similar articulation of structures to explain the historical development of the social situations they analyse, even though these deal with pre-capitalist situations.

This kind of idea is extended further, in that, in each historical case, the particular situation, 'the social formation', is to be understood not by just one 'mode of production' but by an articulation of several. For example, in a colonial situation a communal mode of production may coexist with a capitalist one but the capitalist one will dominate the communal mode of production; in other words, the structural relationship of the two modes of production will not be an equal one, but rather the dominant mode will be more powerful, and it is in the constructing of these many different structures both within individual modes of production and between modes of production that the actual process of history is to be understood. It is this very general notion of understanding causality by this sort of theoretical construction which characterizes the work anthropologists influenced

by Althusser's theories have attempted. Perhaps what marks the influence of Althusser most clearly on anthropology is therefore the refusal to understand the social and historical phenomena in their own terms, a procedure castigated by Althusser as empiricism, but in terms of an underlying system of structural relations, which because it contains within it internal mechanism tensions and contradictions, is the source of historical transformation.

This all inevitably sounds rather metaphorical but certain important points emerge. The situation that a historian or an anthropologist finds in a particular place, at a particular time, let us say in an area in rural France, can only be accounted for, in

Althusserian terms, by first examining what people say and what people do. Doing this and putting this information together will not, however, reveal the historically causative structures. This is what Althusser would call empiricism, which he sees as characterizing most of anthropology and history. By contrast, Althusser would have the anthropologist construct at least two modes of production. One of them, probably referred to as capitalist, would be constructed by theoretically analysing information from a very wide geographical area, perhaps most of the world. The other, perhaps a feudal one, would be constructed from information covering also a wider geographical area, but different from the capitalist one; then the anthropologist would construct the structural interaction, or 'articulation', of the two modes of production, taldng into account the 'inner logic' of each, i.e. the structure of both modes of production, and also how the two are made to mesh, given the fact of the dominance of the capitalist mode of production. This means that the internal consistency of the capitalist mode will be tittle affected by the articulation while the internal consistency of the dominated mode of production will be distorted in all manner of ways by the articulation.

This brief account of the theories of Althusser and his colleagues can serve to explain in part its influence on French anthropologists. First of all they offer a theoretical critique of the type of theory which, we have seen, had been particularly important in British social anthropology but had a very much wider influence —the Radcliffe-Brown theory of social structure. This theory explained the existence and persistence of a

social structure in terms of the way the various parts of the social system in a given locality fitted together. This systemic fit produced a social structure where every part was presumed to have a function in maintaining the whole. Radcliffe-Brown came under attack in Britain and elsewhere from such writers as Gluckman and Leach. Both pointed out that the theory presumed the integrated harmony of the social system and ruled out the possibility of understanding change. Both writers, but especially Leach, pointed out the absurdity of assuming a well-integrated system operating within a boundary which Radcliffe-Brown himself had recognized was arbitrary. Leach demonstrated particularly well in Political *Systems of Highland* Burma (1954) how individuals participated in several structures of different geographical

spread. Finally both Leach and Gluckman, as well as Firth and others, pointed out the superficial character of a theory which accepted that the actors' categories and values were an adequate basis for constructing a social system. Leach, for example, pointed out that, although peoples like the Kachins of Highland Burma might talk of their society as made up of groups recruited by descent and bound to each other by marriage ties of an apparently eternal character, the situation on the ground was of local groups constructed on a variety of ad hoc principles and bound together by continually changing *ad hoc* alliances.

These three criticisms of Radcliffe-Brown's theory of social structure - that it is static, that it gives importance to boundaries where there are none, and that it mistakes actors' concepts for reality - became the basis of various more or less fully formulated criticisms in British anthropology. A problem for the critics, however, was that, although they seemed to be able to score easily against the theories of their predecessors, they had nothing viable to put in its place. Attempts at a revival of individualist theories, under such names as transactionalism, or network analysis, ran into the same difficulties which they had come up against before in the history of social theories, difficulties which had in fact already been emphasized by Marx.

Althusser's position avoided the problems of social structure and gave a real theoretical alternative in the analysis of society. As a result its influence rapidly spread beyond France to Britain, the United States,

and many other countries. Althusserian theory recognized the diversity of structures differentially located in one area. It did not assume that the area of study was the location of a system. It did not construct its system from the conscious representation people had of their society; yet at the same time it retained the idea of structure and did not fall back on a type of individualism resembling that of the utilitarian, which had been the basis of the main theories constructed by British anthropologists in the light of their criticism of Radcliffe-Brown.

As a result of Althusser's influence the task for Marxist anthropologists became that of 'constructing' modes of production so that, first, their internal structure could be demonstrated and their potential dynamic hypothesized, and, secondly, so that the articulation between different modes of production in social formations could be understood. Anthropologists, as a result of the combined influence of Godelier and Althusser, did not see

being a Marxist anthropologist as a matter of accepting the views which the founders of Marxism held about pre-capitalist societies, but rather as doing the same kind of analysis as they had done for capitalism in the societies which they were studying.

This is the task which was first outlined by E. Terray in the book we have already referred to: Marxism and Primitive Society, a book which began the difficult discussion of exactly how one constructs a mode of production in pre-capitalist societies.

The first part of the book is a study of Morgan's work and is a kind of clearing of the way by stressing that, though to an extent Morgan's theory is valuable and, as Engels had said, somewhat similar to some Marxist notions, Marxists should not in any way be bound by Morgan's evolutionary sequences. Having in this way distanced himself from the orthodox Soviet view, Terray goes on in the second half of the book to try to build up a mode of production appropriate for dealing with societies based on lineages. This study starts by reanalysis of an ethnography by C. Meillassoux which examines the economic organization of a people called the Gouro who live in the Ivory Coast. Meillassoux's book is in many ways a traditional anthropological study, surprisingly good, given the short period of fieldwork, but in

other respects rather disappointing when compared to such classics of economic anthropology as A. I. Richard's Land Labour and Diet among *the* Bemba *of* Northern Rhodesia, or R. Firth's *Primitive Polynesian* Economics. What marks out Meillassoux's study from earlier works is that it already contains an attempt to introduce the concept of a mode of production and, thereby, to put the study within a wider Marxist framework. Actually this attempt is only schematic in the book and is more fully developed in articles which appeared at much the same time and which seem more genuine starting points than the main study (Meillassoux, 1960; 1967). In these Meillassoux talks of a segmentary, or 'lineage', mode of production, which he shows had been undermined first by trade then by the colonial system. Meillassoux characterizes this mode of production almost exclusively in terms of technology, for example by stressing the importance of hoe agriculture and its implications for the type of labour involved.

Terray's criticisms of Meillassoux's work follow directly from Althusser's position. First of all, he rejects the idea that a society such as that of the Gouro can be understood adequately in terms of one and only one mode of production. The reason for this is

that, only if we see in a certain case the combination of several modes of production can we both retain the generalizing aspect of the theory of modes of production and account for the specificity of each instance. Labelling a whole range of societies as manifesting the 'lineage mode of production' makes one unable to explain variation. Terray therefore suggests that one can explain the Gouro's pre-colonial situation by seeing it as the product of a combination of two modes of production, one which he terms 'tribal-village' and another which he terms the 'lineage mode of production'. This later mode of production dominates and dictates the articulation of the two, which produces the Gouro social formation, a unique product of a unique combination.

Each mode of production consists of three elements or 'instances': an economic base, a politico-juridical superstructure, and an ideological superstructure. For Terray, and here he seems to depart somewhat from the Althusserian model of structural causality, it is the economic base which in the last analysis determines the other two instances. This economic base consists of both the technology of production, including

the relations involved in the productive process, and the relations of production. In the case of the village-tribal mode of production, the main technological activity is net hunting, which implies cooperation of the whole village and which serves as a kind of typical example of its operation and of the egalitarian relations of production which it activates, since the nets are owned communally and the product of the hunt is also shared.

Terray's use of Althusser is here principally focussed on showing the value of seeing any social phenomenon as the combination of distinct but uncomfortably related processes, and his criticism is principally an attack on the notion of a social system as an integrated, bounded whole which can be constructed by putting all the empirically observed pieces together. None the less this Althusserian position has since come under a variety of criticisms which have enabled Marxist anthropologists to further refine their concepts.

The first such criticism comes from the Althusserian point of view itself in the work of P. P. Rey (1971; 1975; 1977). It should be noted that several of these criticisms are now accepted by Terray (1974; 1977). Rey criticizes the static character of the juxtaposition of several modes of production in Terray's formulation. Rey points out that such articulation is used by Marx to explain a dynamic

process such as the passage from feudalism to capitalism. This point leads him to reintroduce and emphasize the notion of contradiction as being the key to understanding this dynamic: contradiction between the different logic of different modes of production, contradiction between the interests of different classes, and contradiction between the development of the forces of production and the relations of production —the contradiction which is the 'motor' of change according to Marx in the foreword to The *Preface.* This stress on contradiction leads Rey to affirm strongly the applicability of the class concept for all societies, and to argue that the elders in an African lineage-based society can be analytically seen as a class in relation to the various members of lineages, or similarly women can be seen as a class in relation to men. This is because, Rey argues, exploitation as defined by Marx can be shown to take place in social formations where the lineage mode of production is manifest, whether Marx thought it did

or not. Rey repeats the statement by Marx from *The Communist Mani/esto*, which many Marxist anthropologists, especially Soviet anthropologists and Engels, have variously tried to avoid, that the history of *all* existing society is the history of class struggles.

This modification of Terray's position has had many wide-ranging implications and we can here only concentrate on two.

The first such implication has been that the emphasis on the dynamic aspect of analyses in terms of modes of production has led French Marxist anthropologists to turn not to synchronic studies such as that of the Gouro before colonial contact, but to explaining historical transformations. This has two sides. First it has led French Marxist anthropologists to reconsider theoretically the significance of the wider social environment for the working of the societies which they study, especially the colonial and post-colonial environment of Third World countries. This type of analysis has given some of these studies the political raison d'etre which was one of the main reasons for the search for a Marxist theory in anthropology in the first place.

Several anthropologists, especially British anthropologists, had already tried to take into account the effect of the colonial powers on the societies they studied; the list is long and includes such names as Malinowski, L. Mair, M. Fortes, I. Shapera, and many others, and in France the most notable writer who had stressed that effect is probably G. Balandier who was a formative influence on several of the French anthropologists who became

more directly influenced by Althusser later on. Many of these writers were concerned with helping the colonial administration and often with contributing, if they could, to the welfare of colonized peoples. These writers were succeeded by more radical anthropologists, often influenced by liberal or Marxist ideas, who showed the exploitative nature of the colonial and neo-colonial contexts of their study. Perhaps the work of Gluckman, which we have already discussed, falls in this category, and there is no doubt that tins is the case of the already-mentioned work by Worsley and Asad in Britain and of Wolf and Mintz in the United States. The problem with all these studies is that they seemed unable to deal with the colonial, capitalist, or imperialist

systems in the same theoretical framework that they used for analysing the local communities which they studied. For most of these writers the 'wider' framework remained theoretically 'external'. All tried to take into account the 'influence' of colonial powers without any analysis of the colonial system itself and therefore no general theory of the relationship of the two systems. On the other hand Marxist writers who had analysed the structure of colonialism and imperialism, such as Lenin, Kautsky, Luxemburg, and more recently S. Amin and A. G. Gunder Frank, lacked any deep theoretical understanding of pre-capitalist societies.

By contrast the analysis in terms of modes of production, or rather in terms of the articulation of modes of production, advocated by Althusser, Terray, and Rey, enabled the development of a framework to study articulations and contradictions between modes of production of a different nature. A most notable attempt to show different modes of production articulate in Althusserian terms by P. P. Rey, *Colonialisme,* neo-colonialisme et transition au *capitalisme* (1971), which constructs a lineage mode of production for three Congolese groups and shows the gradual distortion and adaptation of this mode of production under the logic of an encroaching capitalist one, also constructed in an Althusserian manner. This study has encouraged many others, for example, Meillassoux's book recently translated into English under the title, Maidens, Meal and Money, which looks as the relation between central capitalist economies and the domestic economies of Third World countries which export migrant workers to them for cheap labour. This study, which employs in part an Althusserian framework, shows well how such a theory has enabled French Marxist anthropo-

logists not to allow themselves to be limited by the traditional boundaries of their discipline, whether theoretical or geographical. Naturally, the use of such a framework has not been limited to France. Studies in this model are appearing in many countries, especially Latin America, the United States, and Britain.

If Rey's emphasis on the place of dynamics and contradiction has enabled French Marxist anthropologists to analyse the changing position of the people they study in the world economy of this century, it

has also enabled them to carry out similar analyses for earlier periods. This is well exemplified in a series of studies by Terray of the development of a West African kingdom in terms of the contradiction between modes of production throughout a long period (e.g. Terray, 1974). These studies, with several others undertaken by a group of French Marxist anthropologists, have begun the task of remaking the traditional Marxist theories concerning the origin of the State in the light of evidence which could not have been available to the founders of Marxism. This interest in history is part of a current strongly influenced by Althusser's ideas, in spite of the fact that his work has sometimes been interpreted as anti-historical. In fact one of the main influences of Althusserian ideas on anthropology has been to make anthropologists look seriously beyond disciplinary boundaries which are particularly irrelevant in a Marxist perspective, and especially to make them look towards history.

The other main point of Rey's criticisms of Terray's earlier formulation consists in extending the concept of class to take in all societies. This is probably the most important point of all, and to see its significance we must recall the effect of Engels's decision to view primitive societies as classless, and recall the effect this had on Marxist anthropology. As we saw, the effect of this idea was quite simply to make the kind of theory Marxists had developed fully for handling capitalism irrelevant for primitive society, since this analysis was based on the notion of class. As a result Engels had to look for an alternative social theory for primitive society and he vacillated between biological and terminological determinism. The introduction of this type of theory continuously hindered Marxist interpretation of primitive societies. Later, this 'anthropological' social theory even spread its influence to Marxist explanations of other social systems, always with disastrous results, even to the extent that in the

hands of such writers as Marvin Harris, who, as we saw, considers himself some sort of Marxist, it became a general social theory.

This tendency to expand the scope of Engels's theory from primitive societies to other systems is exactly the opposite of what characterizes French Marxist anthropology. What such writers as Godelier, Terray, Rey, and Meillassoux do is to extend back, from capitalist systems to

pre-capitalist societies, the kind of analysis Marx developed. Rey, above all, recognized that this requires the introduction of class as an analytical concept for precapitalist societies.

Introducing the notion of class into primitive societies is not without difficulty, and some Marxist anthropologists, notably Godelier, do not find it generally acceptable. It is not difficult to find categories of people opposed to each other by their unequal relation in the process of production in pre-capitalist systems. Men and women, probably, stand in such a relation in all known societies, in spite of what Morgan and Engels believed; the same can be said of the relation between juniors and elders in societies based on lineages. However, even if this is true, such 'classes' differ considerably from those with which we are familiar in capitalist systems. Clearly a 'class' of women as opposed to a 'class' of men must be seen in very different terms than the proletariat in an industrialized society. Is it then reasonable to talk of them in the same terms?

One answer to this question is given by Terray in an article published in English, 'Class and Class Consciousness in an Abron Kingdom of Guyaman' (Terray, 1974). After arguing for an explanation of the history of this kingdom in terms which are clearly influenced by Rey, Terray goes on to consider whether groups in lineage societies which are based on the seemingly 'natural' phenomena of age and sex can be truly considered as classes. His answer is based on Marx's implicit distinction between 'classes for themselves' and 'classes in themselves'. Classes in themselves are groups standing in an unequal relation to other similar groups as regards the control of the means of production. Age and sex groups in traditional African societies, for example, are clearly classes 'in themselves'. However the fact that these groups are seen as primarily defined by biology hinders the exploited classes becoming conscious of their condition as a class, or in other words becoming classes 'for themselves'. In this

way such classes differ from classes in capitalist society (Terray, 1974). With this kind of analysis the Marxist notion of class, the key to Marxist social theory, does apply to pre-capitalist societies, and, indeed, reveals with great exactness their character.

The work of Meillassoux, Terray, and Rey belongs in many ways to the same developing tradition, and it is not surprising that, although these authors criticize each other, they also see themselves as building on their respective achievements. This is less so with the other major figure in French Marxist anthropology, Maurice Godelier, whom we have already mentioned, and of several of his collaborators, such as Pierre Bonte. Godelier's work originated in a critique of economic theory and this made him turn to anthropology, especially to the controversy among economic anthropologists between 'formalist' and 'substantivist'. Formalist economic anthropology was an attempt to explain the economy of primitive peoples in terms of traditional economic notions such as supply and demand and marginality. This position was then criticized by a group of historians and anthropologists who were in part influenced by Marxist ideas. This group, the substantivists, argued that the notion of the market and of supply and demand, already implied the institutions and the concepts of a capitalist economy, and they were therefore misleading when applied to pre-capitalist economies. Their criticism is somewhat reminiscent of Marx's criticism of classical economics, in that Marx too argued that economics pretended to explain the economy from first principles but that in fact it already assumed as natural something which was political in origin, the unequal distribution of the means of production. Godelier accepts the substantivist criticism of the formalists, but goes much further. His position, although developed much earlier, is in many ways similar to that of the Terray of more recent formulation (Terray 1975; 1977). Like the Althusserians, Godelier sees as the key causal factor the structure of the mode of production and the interrelation of different modes of production (Godelier, 1973:83-92). For him the formalist position is not just misleading for the study of pre-capitalist economics, it is simply wrong: it fails to explain in terms of underlying structures; but the same is true of the substantivists, who tend to accept at their face value the political and kinship institutions of primitive societies and see in them an explanation of the economy. Godelier, by contrast, wants a general theory of modes of production going beyond the surface

and explaining this surface, whether it be 'the market', or 'kinship', or 'politics'.

Godelier, does differ from the Althusserians on a number of points. Unlike them he sees no need to construct more than one mode of production in all instances. One effect of this, in spite of Godelier's criticism of the notion of tribe as it has been used in anthropology, is that his explanatory models often coincide with traditional anthropological divisions. In his reanalysis of Turnbull's material on the Mbuti pygmies, for example, he only constructs modes of production which are coterminous with the tribal definition of the Mbuti as given by the very traditional anthropologist, Turnbull (Godelier, 1975).

Godelier also differs from such writers as Terray and Rey in the major attention he pays in all of his work to the intellectual logic of systems of thought and representation. This interest he derives, as we saw above, from the work of Levi-Strauss. Not only is Godelier interested in demonstrating the structural character of such phenomena as myth, but also, like Levi-Strauss, he seeks to demonstrate that this structure has historical implications in that even though the course of change only comes from transformation in the mode or modes of production, the way this change is realized is as a transformation of the structure of the intellectual phenomena themselves, and in terms of their logic, as well as that of the logic of the mode of production. For example, people from New Guinea with a specific system of religion at a particular point of time will change this religion in changing material circumstances, perhaps as a result of the incursion of Europeans, but this change will be in terms of the logic of their pre-existing system, not just in terms of the changing politico-economic system. This means that for Godelier history is to be explained as a combination of different structures, some theoretical and concerned with modes of production, others cognitive.

This interest in the cognitive aspect of life manifests itself in many ways and is what give special value to much of Godelier's work. It also forms the basis of what he sees as his greatest disagreement with the Althusserians. This disagreement lies in his argument that the role in the mode of production of any particular institutional system, such as kinship, or politics, or religion, cannot be known just from its apparent nature. Religion, for example, is often seen by Marxist writers as only an ideo-

logical phenomenon, having no direct role in the organization of relations of production, simply because this is true in capitalist systems; and they then assume that this is true in other social formations. For Godelier, however, no such assumption can be made and he shows that this is not true in other societies. For example, among the ancient Incas, religion plays a totally different role, because in the Inca Empire religion actually organized relations of production, or, to put it as strongly as Godelier would put it himself, among the Inca, because the extraction of surplus from local communities towards the State was organized by temples and motivated by the belief in the divinity of the ruling class, religion was, in some of its aspects, a relation of production. Although it is not easy to see how this position differs from that of some of the Althusserians Godelier continuously criticizes, it is true that Althusser in particular seems to fail to understand the variability of organization in precapitalist societies. Quite apart from who is guilty of the mistaken view isolated by Godelier, die point remains extremely important and particularly revealing of the type of challenge some anthropological data offers to traditional Marxism.

It has often been argued by critics of Marx's theories-for example, the anthropologist L. Dumont-that Marx's ideas, far from being a basis for a universal history of man, are simply a typical formulation of the nineteenth-century obsession with economics. In other times and other places such things as religion, or politics, or even kinship predominate in people's minds and form the basis of their emotions and concerns, and therefore Marx's works are irrelevant to these societies. This observation is seen as giving the he to the determination of society by the economic base which is seen by these critics as the characteristic proposition of Marxism. For them Marxism is revealed as simply an aspect of the ideology of the time when Marx was writing. This is the position that Godelier tries to answer by stressing, as Marx had stressed, that one must not mistake the function of an institution with its appearance. Religion may indeed organize production and distribution but this in no way invalidates Marx, rather it confirms his hypothesis, in that it shows that it is the mechanism performing these functions which dominates, whatever that mechanism might be; and the representation of the mechanism dominates the concerns of people precisely because it acts and regulates the mode of production.

This point is made extensively by Godelier in relation to kinship. Kinship has always been of central interest to anthropologists because, in so many of the societies they study, nearly all social relations are seen in kinship terms. It is not surprising therefore that so much attention has been given by Marxists to the question of how this phenomenon should be understood. Terray and Rey take a position that kinship, as well as organizing production, seems to hide its real nature, and therefore always functions as an ideology. Godelier argues against this. He sees Terray, Rey, and Meillassoux as using similar reasoning to Worsley's arguments concerning the Tallensi: that when people talk of kinship they are really talking about something else. He argues that, in kinship-based society, kinship is inseparably both infrastructure and ideology, because it performs both the functions of infrastructure and of ideology as one. It is therefore not useful, he argues, to see kinship as a 'mask' for class relations. Relations of production are, for Godelier, purely analytical constructs, and so one cannot say that people's consciousness hides what is an analytical construct of the anthropologists. Godelier would argue that such writers as Terray see relations of production, i.e. class, as being at the same level of empirical reality as kinship; this Godelier argues is implied when Terray considers the possibility that kinship ideology might be torn away to reveal hidden class relations under certain historical circumstances.

For Godelier, kinship has at an empirical level to be accepted for itself and that is that. The difference between Godelier and the Althusserians is, I believe, much less clear than Godelier seems to think, but his work is valuable in stressing a point that Marxists with little knowledge of anthropology find difficulty to accept and understand: the fact that kinship, or for that matter religion, is a genuine fundamental experience of many precapitalist peoples, and that it is totally wrong to suggest that it is a kind of metaphor enforced by the powers that be, a kind of argument we find in Worsley's reanalysis of the Tallensi or in Leach's study of a Ceylonese village, Pul *Eliya* (1961).

Godelier's insistence on this point is extremely valuable and takes us back to a fundamental aspect of Marx which, as we saw originally, comes from Kant: that any sociological account of human society must accept as a given the subjectivity of those it studies, though for Marx,

unlike Kant, this must be explained as the product of material circumstances through analysis.

Godelier's emphasis on accepting what people say at its face

value has itself raised a series of extremely interesting problems. One of its implications seems to be that all that people say is an organized structured system, but that it is of a totally different nature to the structure of the modes of production. Since it is at the analytical level of modes of production that the source of social movement is to be found, the theory implies that what people think or do is never a causal factor in social transformation. Change and movement come from the development of structural interactions at the theoretical, non-empirical level of modes of production.

This position accords well with the general emphasis of Althusser's theory. Althusser stresses continually the contrast between Marx's earlier writings concerned with individual consciousness, which he sees as little more than a development of socialist rhetoric and egalitarian notions which were not specifically Marxist, and Marx's later work, which moves away form the individual to structures and systems. This contrast is as old as Marxism itself: one interpretation of Marxism minimises the role of individual conscious action, in which political action must consist and emphasizes the historical inevitability of systemic development; another interpretation reverses the balance. The influence of anthropology on early Marxist theory had been to stress the inevitable progression of stages; this then had been, to a certain extent, reversed by Lenin's views concerning the peasantry and the role of the party. The more anti-individualist theory had again come to the fore in the Soviet Union while theories which emphasized the role of political consciousness have been formulated by non-Soviet Marxists, such as the famous Italian Communist Gramsci, and such different writers as Lukacs and Habermas, all criticized by Althusser. Godelier on the whole, although interested in individual representations, is like Althusser and his anthropological followers. He does not see in thought a causative element in the development of history. His work belongs, as a result, to the general anti-individualist tradition in Marxism.

Many anthropologists, as well as Marxists, have been uncomfortable with such a position. Anthropology is unique among the social sciences in that the scientist knows intimately the people he is writing about. Anthropologists are therefore particularly unwilling to dismiss people's intentional and conscious behaviour as historically insignificant, especially since close knowledge of

people everywhere seems to reveal a situation where people are less totally mystified about the real conditions of their existence than suggested by Godelier. In a recent article (Bloch, 1977a), I argued that in some contexts people may well seem to accept structures which organize and legitimate inequality in hierarchies, but this should not make us forget that they are able to, and indeed in some contexts do, challenge hierarchy and exploitation. For example, people are able to see the relations between elders and juniors purely in kinship terms at some historical moment, but they are also able, at others, to see them as class relationships as is implied by Terray and others.

Because of these considerations several recent Marxist anthropologists complement the views of the writers we have looked at by examining the processes leading to the formation of ideology, the relationship between ideology and knowledge, and the conditions under which ideology is challenged. In other words they examine the kind of concerns which Marx looked at in *The* German *Ideology,* a work of which Althusser is highly suspicious. This interest in people's own representation of themselves, of their social systems, and of the social systems of others seems to be developing on many fronts in Marxist anthropology. It is probably due in part to the renewed influence of British Marxist historians such as C. Hill, E. Hobsbawm, and E. P. Thompson, who have revived interest in the rhetoric and activities of popular radical movements throughout the ages. It is not surprising, therefore, that this aspect of Marxist anthropology, which seems to be only just beginning, should be particularly noticeable in the work of British anthropologists. This is in part in response to a British historical tradition, because British anthropology has been the anthropological school where the greatest possible contact between anthropologists and informants has been encouraged.

This last point brings me to a much more general and fundamental criticism of the whole French anthropological school. As we saw, their starting point was the attempt to separate an abstract theory of modes of production and articulation from the specific case of capitalism. In doing this French anthropologists have been to a large extent not only successful but also too successful. This is because, having abstracted their structures from real historical and anthropological circumstances, they have, in a sense, once more reversed Marx's fundamental advance over his predecessors; that is, the discovery that it is in

the real processes of history and society that man reveals his true nature. Instead, French anthropologists, and some of their followers outside France, seem to have retreated to discussing disembodied abstractions.

I would argue that the controversies in French anthropology we have just considered are of value because they bring anthropologists back to the social process, but often these controversies have also led to empty formalism as they have taken us away from man in society and in politics, in other words away from Marxism.

Ironically it is non-Marxist, British anthropology which has been truest to the original decision, on the part of Marx, that it was in real history and in real society that the nature of man is revealed. However, it is because British anthropology had lost its original theoretical framework, because in any case this theoretical framework had always been weak, that the fundamental strength of the tradition seemed recently to have come to very little. This, however, is now changing as several British anthropologists have, as a result of their contact with the French Marxist tradition, been able to use their central strength; that is, their commitment to the understanding of the people they study, and their familiarity with the tools of ethnographic analysis, so as to contribute to Marxism an analysis of primitive systems similar to the one Marx made of capitalism. Perhaps the fruit of the abstract theoretical analyses of French Marxist anthropology might in the end be principally a renewal of something like the British social anthropological tradition, integrated in a wider framework of new Marxist studies.

In this chapter we have examined what has been really a revolution in Marxist anthropology, a revolution which originated in France but whose influence has spread to anthropological schools throughout the world. The basis of that revolution is that Marxist anthropology is no longer concerned with going back to the views of the founders of Marxism, dealing either with the line of evolution of society or with what they thought primitive societies were like. By contrast, it attempts to apply to primitive society the concepts and analyses of mature Marxist works developed for capitalism, As we have seen, concepts which were really developed by Marx in *Capital,* such as class, contradiction, mode of production, and articulation, and concepts such as ideology, developed earlier, have been the tools of modern Marxist anthropology, and all these were defined in relation to the study

of capitalism. What characterizes this anthropology is that Marx and die founders of Marxism are taken as guides for the type of social analysis to be carried out, not as authorities on precapitalist societies.

The evolutionary scheme that became orthodoxy in the USSR has been almost entirely rejected. It is seen by recent Marxist anthropologists in the West as being based on insufficient or false anthropological and historical information. It is seen, above all, as centring far too much on the specific history of Europe. Marxist anthropology, for French and British Marxist anthropologists, is a matter of analysing different societies without prejudice as to their nature, according to the model of analysis which Marx sets out in his mature work; but it is also based on the belief that there is no possibility of doing a politically neutral analysis of fellow human beings.

We can, by way of conclusion, look at the place of this type of Marxist anthropology in relation to the other types that we have considered in this book. We saw, in our analysis of the works of Marx and Engels, how the combination of the two uses of anthropology, the rhetorical and the historical, in The Origin led to the introduction of a pre-class notion of primitive societies. The effect of seeing primitive societies as pre-class and pre-exploitation meant that the Marxist tools developed in *Capital* became inapplicable, because these tools were centred on the notion of class exploitation and ideology. As a result Engels, and later Kautsky and Plekhanov, had to import another social theory

for dealing with these ‘pre-class’ societies. This other social theory was the vulgar materialism which dominated anthropology at the end of the late nineteenth century and which was imported, together with information about primitive peoples. This was a theory characterized by technological determinism, and the attempt to extend Darwin’s theory of natural selection to human societies. It was in no way unique to Marxism.

Unfortunately, because of a series of political developments, this theory came to dominate the study of primitive societies in the USSR and was even applied, to a certain extent, to other types of societies. This trend was challenged several times in the USSR, but these challenges were largely unsuccessful. The study of precapitalist societies in the USSR continued as a result, in a pre-Marxist spirit.

When we turn to the ‘Marxist’ anthropologists of the United

States, and such works as those of Marvin Harris, we find an oddly paradoxical situation. There the theory which Engels had imported at the last moment from such anthropologists as Morgan and Tylor to deal with the social process of primitive societies was expanded into a general theory and was seen by many American anthropologists as what Marxism was about. In other words, what Marvin Harris did was to reject the barrier which Engels had established between primitive and class societies in order to extend to all societies the type of analysis which Engels had cobbled together for primitive ones.

When we turn to the work of the French anthropologists we have considered in this chapter, it is clear that exactly the opposite process has occurred. French anthropologists rejected the social theory which had been used for primitive societies by Engels and the Soviets, and indeed rejected most of their notions about the nature of such societies. However, like Marvin Harris, they refused to accept the barrier between primitive and class societies. This is particularly clear in the work of such writers as Rey and Terray, who argued, as Marx had argued in The *Manifesto,* that all societies are class societies. What the French Marxist anthropologists have done is to apply to primitive societies the analysis which Marx had used in *Capital;* in other words, to extend Engels’s analysis of primitive societies

back, instead of extending it forward as Marvin Harris does. This process, however, inevitably means that Marxist anthropology cannot be a matter of going back to the sources. It implies from the first that Marx's and Engels's knowledge of primitive society was quite insufficient as a basis for modern anthropology. It sees Marxist anthropology as something to be created, not merely something to be revealed in the works of the founders.

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